

The Romancing Quest

By Doctor Scraps



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Chapter 1

It was a glorious early afternoon in the village of Ponyville. The sky was clear, the birds were singing, not too hot, not too cold, the rodents were minding their manners...And it was all ignored by a set of Ponies lounging around on the balcony of a tree house dwelling where lived the resident bookworm and organizer extraordinaire, Twilight Sparkle, protégé of the honorable Princess Celestia herself.

Twilight herself, and her close companion Rarity, were spending the afternoon with their snouts buried into some books. Usually, Twilight Sparkle was more fond of intellectual material, and the occasional Choose-your-own-adventure once in a blue moon. Crypto zoology, astronomy, mathematics, scientific principals, journals of other researchers...This time however, she found herself a few chapters into a paperback novel riddled with folded pages placed in turn of bookmarks, the cover featuring a lady Unicorn in the arms of an idealistically muscular stud pony set against a sunset, with what looked to be a pirate ship in the background.

Rarity had her own nose tucked into a paperback, featuring almost an exact copy of Twilights cover, except this time the lady Unicorn and the stud pony were set against a midnight sky with a crescent moon overhead.

Rarity looked like she was enjoying herself, giggling at times, and appearing outright riveted at others. Twilight on the other hand was nearly forcing every turn of the page. As far as she could discern, it was about the daughter of a land baron, stuck in an arranged marriage to which she did not approve, and had chosen to run away before being captured by Pirates, and as the story stood now, was in midst of being seduced by the roguish pirate captain, while her fiancé struggled to find her.

To her count, Twilight had rolled her eyes approximately forty times since she started reading, minus the one after she read the summary on the back. It was just so pretentious and full of itself, full of unnecessary drama, and convoluted speech. Not to mention the pirate captain was depicted in such a historically inaccurate way for the period it was supposed to be set

in, and the fact that it seemed like his overly dramatic wooing of the main character was actually working made her brain hurt.

He stroked her cheek tenderly with a chipped and battered hoof, worn with the hard life on the seas. Her gaze captivated him, like a pool of gems plucked from the richest of coffers set under moonlight. She was far too beautiful to belong in the hooves of a landed Noblepony. No, she would be his and his alone. "Of all the treasures I have ever accumulated, you are the one I prize most..."

"But I am not yours, Del Mar...I belong to Lord Turfway. They will find me, and they will kill you." Sarahtoga tried to sound defiant, but her body betrayed her mind. She found herself nuzzling the battered hoof that lay against her cheek. Never before had a colt been so forward, or so affectionate...Not even Lord Turfway, her future husband.

"Let them try." Del Mar laughed. She shivered under him as he mocked even death to claim her as his. She let out a soft whinny as he thrust her back onto the bed, trotting up over her, peering down at her with want and desire.

"No...I'll scream..." Sarahtoga gasped as he loomed over her.

"Then let me silence you..." His lips drew near...

Barf. Twilight stuck her tongue out. She wasn't sure what annoyed her most, the fact that it was written with this much cheese in mind, or that someone actually believed that this is how 'romantic' encounters were supposed to happen. You're a unicorn...blast him out the window...

After a few minutes had passed, or an eternity by Twilights observation as she stomached yet another scene where the main character was getting her dressed pawed at by unsavory pirates, only to again be rescued by her dashing rogue, Rarity drew her attention with a contented sigh and stretch. "Ooooh, I think that calls for a break." She fanned herself with her hoof, a small blush creeping across her cheeks as she sat up on the balcony. "How are you enjoying The Silver Horeshoe? Isn't it just steamy?"

"Steamy...Yeah..." Twilight folded the corner of a page in to mark her spot rather than wasting a perfectly good bookmark, rolling her eyes for the forty first time. A break sounded excellent.

"Are you not enjoying it?" Rarity asked, growing suddenly so very concerned. "I've read that one so many times myself, that I was certain it was a classic."

"M...Maybe I just haven't gotten to the good part yet..." Twilight forced a smile. She didn't want to seem unappreciative that her friend had thought to share her small collection of trashy romance novels. "I'm only on...chapter fifteen..."

"Oh my, you are indeed on the threshold of the 'good part', dear Twilight." Rarity trotted over and pointed out one of the many dog ears in the book. "This one in particular. I can hardly finish the chapter without needing a break in between paragraphs." Again, more fanning.

Twilight raised a brow and skipped to that chapter...

She barely made it past the second paragraph alone before she shut the book entirely, holding it down with two hooves as though it were some beast trying to get at her, a fiery heat burning her cheeks.

"Oh my ponies...I really hope you keep this stuff away from Sweetie Belle."

"But of course, Twilight. Sweetie Belle is FAR too young to understand and appreciate a tale of adventure, a tale of romance!" Rarity gestured dramatically. "These are stories that speak the very language, of the unbridled chaos of love!"

"Right...Unbridled chaos and love..." Twilight cleared her throat and ventured back inside to go fix some iced tea. "Well, when I find myself being swept off my feet by someone with more muscles than sense, I hope you don't take offense if I decide to skip the 'kidnapped by pirates' phase of the whole experience, okay?"

"Haven't you ever been in love, Twilight? Swept up in those fiery emotions, where the universe seemed to spiral out of control all around you in the arms of your celestial equal?" Rarity feigned a damsel-like fainting pose on the balcony.

"Nope. I really can't say I have." Twilight responded from inside.

Rarity glanced back, feeling slightly annoyed, her guilty pleasure lost on this philistine bookworm pony. Then again did it surprise her? "Hmmm...I suppose you wouldn't..."

Twilight's head suddenly appeared out the doorway again, raising a brow suspiciously at Rarity. "What was that?"

Rarity just waved a hoof dismissively as she returned to her reading. "It makes sense I suppose. You are certainly 'married to your work', as they put it."

"What is that supposed to mean, exactly?" For some reason, Rarity's comments annoyed her.

"Well, I know I've never seen you out with anypony."

Twilight trotted heatedly back out onto the balcony, putting a hoof over Rarity's current page. "You don't think I can manage it, do you?"

"Oh, I would never dare accuse you of such, Twilight." Rarity glanced away smugly. No, no she did not think she could manage it.

"How about you? I never see you prancing around in 'unbridled chaos'," Twilight made air quotes with her hooves. "With anyone either."

"I keep my private life private, thank you very much..." Rarity looked the other way, nose still up in the air. "Besides, it would break so many hearts if everypony knew I was exclusive."

"Fine then." Twilight 'hmmph'ed, turning to trot back inside. "We'll see about that."

"Whatever do you mean, dear Twilight?" Rarity was only half listening at this point. Twilight certainly was cute when she got annoyed.

"Love is just another element of Harmony," Twilight tossed her head back as she paused in the doorway. "And as such it's my duty as a royal researcher to comprehend every angle of my subject. That includes relationships."

Rarity sat up and watched Twilight retreating form, shaking her head in dismay. "You silly filly, romance is not something that you study."

"Just you wait Rarity." Twilight glanced back with a determined grin, an expression that usually meant the gears of a great mastermind were at work. "In the name of all of my research into the magic of friendship, I, Twilight Sparkle, will not rest until I have a Coltfriend!"

...

...Across Ponyville, a radiant coil of pink energy known as Pinkie Pie hummed to herself as she bounced along the road in step with an inconspicuous yellow Pegasus known as Fluttershy. Suddenly, the pink one stopped in mid air and started vibrating from ear to hoof before crashing to the ground.

"Oh my, Pinkie Pie, are you alright?" Fluttershy leaned over her friend, who now saw little birdies orbit around her vision.

"Oh wow! That's a new one!" Pinkie Pie rolled back onto her feet, suddenly vibrating all over the place again.

"What does this one mean?" Fluttershy asked, a little afraid to find out.

"I dunno! It tingles! I hope it isn't a portent of doom or something!" Pinkie Pie was enjoying the sensation too much to sound worried...

...

"—Now then, Spike, help me find every book that covers the subject of 'love'." Twilight stood in the middle of the impressive collection of bookshelves that made up her sitting room.

"On it!" Spike declared enthusiastically as he took to the shelves while Twilight prepared her study area.

"Out of sheer curiosity, Twilight, how are you planning to go about this venture?" Rarity was choosing to be only mildly involved in proceedings while continuing her own book from before.

"Very simple, Rarity. I'm going to research every book I have that covers Love and Romance, and then I'm going to apply what I've learned for the practical purpose of attracting a mate." Twilight stated simply as she prepared her notebook and quill.

"Goodness, you make it sound so...Sterile and lifeless." Rarity made a face like she tasted a fresh made Baked Bad. "Are you absolutely certain you're not going about this a bit...half cocked?"

Twilight waved a hoof in Rarity's direction. "You said so yourself that love is like chaos, and if it can be chaos, it can also be logical."

Rarity could only smile and shake her head. The poor dear was going to have to learn the hard way, no doubt. "I won't stand in your way, then, Twilight dear..."

"Thank you. Spike, those books?" Twilight asked, noticing her desk was still bare.

"Um...Just a minute...still looking..." Spike called from the shelves.

"Uh....Twilight? I don't think you have any books on love."

"Are you serious?" Twilight asked, "I have one of the most extensive personal libraries in Canterlot. Are you saying I have nothing at all on the subject?"

"The librarian should keep record of her books..." Rarity said in a sing-song voice.

"Quiet, you." Twilight glared at Rarity.

"Wait! I found one!" Spike waved a book in his hand from the ladder. He scrambled down from the ladder in sudden excitement, tripping on a rung and crashing the rest of the way.

"Ah, thank you Spike." Twilight said as she used her magic to levitate the book away from the crumpled heap that was her assistant on the floor.

"...Tales of Love and Chivalry...It's a book of fairy tales, I can't use this, can I...?" She opened a page and the image of a fire breathing dragon lunged out at her, making her squeak. It was also a pop-up book, apparently. Twilight sighed. "Is this really all I have?"

"Afraid so, Twilight..." Spike dusted himself off. "I found it wedged between two encyclopedia's. I don't even think it's yours."

"Fine. Then book work is out of the question." Twilight stated.

"Ah, good, you're starting to make sense." Rarity commented from behind her novel.

"We skip right on to field work." Twilight continued with a high level of confidence. "Spike, grab my notebook. We're going out."

"Right on it, boss!" Spike grabbed the book and quills from the desk.

"Wait, what? What is your plan this time?" Rarity put the book down now, giving Twilight a quizzical expression.

"I'll interview everyone in Ponyville about what they think love is. If I collect a sufficient amount of data from inquiry, maybe I'll be able to put together a hypothesis to work with and be able to continue on from there. It's all part of the scientific theory."

"W-well?" Rarity asked.

"Well what?"

"Aren't you going to ask me first?" Rarity held a hoof to her chest and smiled sweetly while batting her eyelashes.

"Oh I already know about how you feel about love. All that unrestrained passion and stuff. Could you lock up when you're done?" Twilight asked as she put her notebook and things in her saddlebag and prepared to leave on what, in her mind, was a truly intellectual pursuit.

"Oh...Of course, Twilight. You can count on me." Rarity said softly, doing her best to smile, but feeling a bit put off.

"Later then." Twilight and Spike ventured forth, the heavy wooden door closing punctuating their exodus.

Rarity rolled her eyes and returned to her reading. She was on the best part, and she was not going to let Twilights lapse in sanity ruin it for her. "...Oh Darius, you dirty dirty pony..."

...

"So then..." Twilight asked. "How would you define love?"

Derpy Hooves pondered for a moment, scratching her chin, walleyed gaze rotating. It then suddenly struck her. "Love is like...a Muffin! A muffin, with frosting on it!" She began making a motion like she was holding a ball in her hooves.

"You mean like a cupcake?" Twilight asked questionaly, raising an brow as she looked up from her notebook.

Derpy stared at Twilight with a dumbfounded expression. "Whoa..."

...

"A coltfriend? Yeah I've had one of those." Rainbow Dash said, very matter-of-factly, as she reclined on a low flying cloud. She had been enjoying a perfectly good snooze after a long morning of monitoring cloud comings and goings, when Twilight had decided to prod her with weird questions.

"Well, how did you two meet?" Twilight asked from the ground.

"He came up to me after flying practice, and was all 'hey, you wanna?', and I was all 'yeah sure'. So we did."

"That's it?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

...

"What's a coltfriend? Is that a boy? Cuz boys are kinda icky, Twilight." Scootaloo said.

...

Twilight sighed as she stared at Fluttershy, with her head buried in the ground like a kind of ostrich, trembling.

"Right...Sorry I asked."

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"It's like a warrrrmmmm apple pie." Granny Smith said.

...

"Love is like the most super duper most awesomest thing ever! It's like a never ending party, but a party hugs and kisses and stuff!" Pinkie Pie stated with the usual overabundance of energy, hopping around Twilight.

"I see..." Twilight jotted that down. "And have you ever been in love?"

"Nope!"

...

"Love, huh?" Applejack mused as she chewed on the end of a piece of straw, taking a break to converse with Twilight. "Well, shoot, sugarcube, I was always too much o' a tomboy for anything like that. Most boys were either 'fraid of me, or treated me like one o' the guys."

"Ah, I see..." Twilight sighed, but smiled to her friend. "Well, thanks anyway, Applejack..."

"Now, hold on, Twi. What's with the sudden interest in love and whatsuch?"

"Well...Rarity brought over some books to share after lunch..." Twilight ran a hoof over her mane.

"Ah, she hauled out her stash of dirty Clop novels huh?" Applejack shook her head in sympathy. She'd been on the end of that generous exchange before.

"You too, huh?" Twilight managed a laugh. "Anyway...She started teasing me about how I've...well...I've never been in love before." She settled under the shade of the tree, looking up at the leaves dancing in the breeze. "So, I lost my temper and kind of boasted I could use my studies in

friendship to the same extent as with love, and use that to attract someone. It's...kinda childish now that I stop and think about it."

"Well..." Applejack settled down beside. "Is there anyone out there that's caught your eye in particular? You could probably have yer pick o' the herd."

"That's the thing...The only people I have any sort of deep emotional relationship with is you guys." Twilight lowered her head onto the grass. "But...that's not love-love...That's...Friendship-love." She looked up at Applejack, smiling sheepishly. "You know...like sisters."

Applejack smiled and ruffled Twilights mane. "That's sweet, sugar. You know what? Don't give up. You'll find your steed in shining armor sure enough as spring comes. It's easy for people like Rarity. All she has to do is bat her eyes at some Colt and he's willin' to follow her off into the Everfree Forest."

"...I still feel like a foal for all those things I said to Rarity. I shouldn't have taken her teasing so seriously...Thanks for the talk, Applejack."

...

Rarity was still at Twilights when the purple Unicorn returned to her dwelling, propped up on Twilights couch, in a bathrobe, a cup of hot tea and another novel in hand.

"Ah, welcome back...How was your field trip? Learn anything earth shattering?" The white Unicorn asked, not taking her eyes from her book.

"Not really..." Twilight said, head hanging. "Look...I'm sorry for—"

"No no...It's quite alright dear, I understand perfectly. I know how your pride works, and you took my jesting as a challenge, to which it is I who must apologize." Rarity lowered the book, gesturing with her reading glasses towards Rarity. "That is why I want to make it up to you."

"Eh? Make it up to me? How?" Twilight blinked.

"Well, it is no secret that I am not without a lack of admirers, which means that I know many a young Colt, so I have arranged for a few blind dates!"

"B..B...B..." Twilight sputtered, feeling a cold chill shoot through her.

"It'll be magnificent! Now, tomorrow, I'll arrange a dinner date with Thunder, and then on Tuesday, a stroll through the park with Barnyard. Ooh, and what are your feelings of tandem base jumping on Wednesday?"

"D...D...D..." Twilight sat down, a twitch overtaking one eye as she stared off into space. "Date?"

"Oh, maybe Base Jumping is more of a second date endeavor, no? Oh, Spike what do you think?"

Spike scratched his head in thought for a moment. "If it was me and you, Rarity, it would be classical music, a starry night, and all the gemstones we could eat."

"A moonlit dinner, marvelous, however I don't think anywhere in Ponyville serves rare gems for consumption..." Rarity stroked her chin in thought. "Oh! Just had a thought! Oil mass-"

There was a heavy thud as Twilight fainted in the middle of the room.

"Well, I would have loved a deep tissue oil massage, but if you're going to be a child about it..." Rarity stared down at Twilight, shaking her head.

...

"Dear Princess Celestia...

Today I learned that, even though they are your friends, they can still sometimes say things that can get under your skin, and what was meant as a joke can be taken in the wrong way, and things can be said or done that just make you look foolish. Being able to laugh at yourself, together, is also an important part of friendship.

Your ever loyal student, Twilight Sparkle.

PS: If I may be allowed a personal question, your majesty...In your opinion, what is love?"

Chapter 2

"Well...tonight's the night." Twilight stared at herself in the mirror, adjusting her mane a little and eyeing what little makeup she had applied. She wondered if it was a bit much for a blind date. She wanted to appear honest, and she didn't really like using makeup. At the most, she put a little star shaped clip in her mane. She nodded approvingly, feeling her confidence swell.

"Let's do this."

...

"So, yeah I'm pushing around 200 pounds regularly. You know. Working my way up to lifting 300." Twilights date, a bronze earth pony with muscles toned as though they were carved from the earth itself, rambled on, flexing and stretching his muscles to emphasize them for her. "It takes a lot of dedication to get this ripped, but you know, I started young, and kept at it. The day I start getting all flabby, is the day I'm done with life, y'know?"

"Yeah, I totally get what you mean." Twilight spoke through the clenched teeth of her forced smile, having barely touched the protein drink her date had ordered for her as they sat together inside the juice bar next door to the Ponyville gym. "I...try and workout every now and then."

"Oh yeah, I can tell. You get really nice legs, Twilight, but you should really work harder on your flank and your midsection. I see a lot of walking around going on there, but not a lot of toning. You should really think of maybe hitting the weight machines and—"

Twilight huffed, blowing her mane out of her eyes, sipping her drink, drinking in the fact that her date just called her fat.

...

It was the second day, and time for the second date...Twilight only had a name to go by, Renaldo, and a note to look for a Pegasus with a red scarf at the fountain by the park.

Renaldo was a blue Pegasus, a flowy red silken scarf wrapped around his neck, adjusting his meticulously groomed mane whilst peering into a compact mirror, almost far too absorbed to notice Twilight approach. She smiled and greeted him cheerfully, "You must be Renaldo! I'm Rarity's friend, Twilight Sparkle."

"Oooh, it is so good to finally meet you, Miss Sparkle!" Renaldo squealed and shook her hoof. "Oh I just adore your hair. You simply must tell me your regimen."

"O-oh, my hair? I...don't really do anything to it, it's just how it naturally falls, I guess." Twilight brushed back her mane, allowing it to fall back into place.

"Oh, I'm so jealous! I go through seven bottles of shampoo a week to keep my hair this lavish! With Rarity's help of course. I would simply just die of embarrassment if I had to spend a week without her magic touch, and letting my hair get all flat. You know for a dressmaker, she should have gotten a dual-cutie mark for being a master hairdresser as well." Renaldo said, primping his features.

"Ah, fancy that. So...Have you two known each other long?" Twilight asked, trying to get the conversation off of Renaldo's hair.

Renaldo put a hoof to his chest and breathed deeply while remembering. "Oh yes, we met years ago during a very dark and trying time in my life. I was a foal without style, without class...Without purpose! Why, if it wasn't for her and her sense of couture, I'd still be buying retail clothes off the rack at department stores, and not the fancy variety they have in Canterlot, but like in Cloudsdale." He shuddered. "They do NOT know how to dress in Cloudsdale. It's all aviary or nothing, dear."

"Ah, great to hear...so, where we going on our date?" Twilight asked.

"I was thinking maybe a little shopping? I was just thinking how this scarf makes me look fat...And it's so...Last week."

...

"I've been having a really nice evening, Swift." Twilight smiled up at her date, a tall and fit olive colt, sporting a rose as his cutie mark, who smiled back and brushed a hoof along her mane as they came to rest on a bench during their walk from having dinner at Chez Alfalfa.

"Think nothing of it, Twilight...The honor was all mine. I've been wanting to ask you out, but I just never had the courage..."

Twilight smiled and closed her eyes as she leaned against him. She felt so warm and safe. Maybe this is what Rarity was talking about. Maybe this was finally working out. Swift was just so...approachable.

"Why, hello there...What's your name?" Swift suddenly said. Twilight looked over and saw her date giving a purposeful look to the sudden arrival of Fluttershy, who was now frozen in sudden 'oh Celestia, someone's talking to me' anxiety.

"I-I...I'm Fluttershy..." Fluttershy lowered her head and stepped back a little, eyeing the taller pony with her usual anxiety.

"Fluttershy...that's a very pretty name..." Swift said, leaning closer to the Pegasus.

"Um...Excuse me..." Twilight cleared her throat.

"So tell me, Fluttershy, what are you doing later tonight?"

...

Fluttershy sat on the stool in the ice cream shop looking very embarrassed and upset, while Twilight stared angrily at the large sundae in front of her, smoke still drifting off of her horn after sending Swift into the next county on a magically summoned tornado.

"I'm sorry I ruined your date..." Fluttershy said timidly.

"...Let's not waste a perfectly good evening. Grab a spoon and help me finish this..." Twilight grumbled through a mouthful.

...

"Shut the door! Shut the door!" Twilight Shrieked as she barreled through the door leading into the almost domed room lit with an orange glow and a pulsing pillar-like control device in its center on a platform. Her date followed after, a brown pony sporting an hourglass cutie mark, slamming the door shut and shoving himself against it while fishing a small pen-like device out of his satchel. "Mmph mm mrrr!" He grunted as he activated the device to lock the door, while green glows and small explosions erupted on the other end.

"What?" Twilight asked as she scrambled up onto the platform surrounding the console.

The Doctor spat out the device. "Flip the switch!"

"Which one?" Twilight panicked. "There's seven switches!"

"The blue one marked Materialization! We've been over this, Miss Sparkle!" The Doctor galloped up to the console. "Get us Equestria on the Star Map while I get us a clear shot out of here." He started flipping switches, and turning dials while Twilight used her magic to utilize the controls in tandem to scan through the star charts for Equestria. The console sparked in Twilights face, causing the room to shake and a whinny to erupt from the Unicorn.

"Behave!" The Doctor pounded on the console with his hoof. "This is no time to be jealous! Are you alright?"

"Just...fine...Alright, I found it! We're locked in!" Twilight manually turned the dial while rubbing one of her eyes.

"Geronimo!" The Doctor cried out as he pounded a large red button, a sudden shift in turbulence sending them both sprawling as the Tardis was sent flying to safety.

...

"Well, then...That didn't end well, did it?" The Doctor just laid there, staring at the ceiling of the Tardis's console room. "I was really hoping to show you the Crystalline Waterfalls of Saturnine Seven. "

"It's alright, Doctor...It's not every day a girl gets to...Travel through space, save the universe twice, meet a young Princess Celestia..." Twilight sat up and thought back.

"Rescued said Princess from pirates..." The Doctor continued.

"Stop a Cybermpony invasion of Manehattan..." Twilight said.

"Don't forget the ordeal with the golden Hay Bale."

"How could I forget..." Twilight laughed wearily as she flopped back onto the floor.

"So...Tell me, Miss Sparkle...Am I at least worth a second date?" The Doctor asked.

"Give me a week to recover...and I'll think about it." Twilight chuckled, half joking.

...

And so it went. A week passed, and more and more dates came and went. Dates that weren't complete disasters were complete bores.

Twilight lay curled up in her bed, face buried in her pillow. She was tired and cranky. She had called off the arranged date tonight...Much to Rarity's disappointment, whom had tried to assure her that Twilight would have loved her friend Chippendale. Things just weren't going as she expected. Nothing of value had occurred, with maybe the exception of her and a time traveling pony keeping the time line accurate...but that had nothing to do with the project in play. She was supposed to be learning how to date, and all she had learned was that colts could be complete wastes of energy.

She groaned and buried herself in her covers when Spike entered, letting in the wretched light. "Go away...I'm not in the mood..."

Spike held up a scroll bearing the seal of the Princess, "Well, excuse me for thinking this might be important."

Twilight peaked from beneath the covers and used her magic to bring the scroll to her.

...

"Dearest Twilight, my loyal pupil...

Love is a strange thing, even for one such as myself. It has many faces, and wears many masks as well. Love is as simple as a hug between sisters, or as complex as two pony's raising another life in this world. But to fall in love is something else entirely...a different kind of magic. It feels like the world ceases to exist, except what is around you and the one you love. When your heart races when you lay eyes upon them, or their hoof brushes yours. Love is acceptance, love is togetherness.

Like Cutie Marks, I believe that each Pony in Equestria has someone special waiting for them. We never know when we will meet them, until the day we do. I wish you luck, Twilight Sparkle.

-Princess Celestia"

...

So even someone like Princess Celestia can't define something as abstract as love. Twilight went over the letter many times, propping her chin up on a hoof. She sat there for a few moments, thinking. "Spike, my notebook."

Spike brought her the notebook and quill, and Twilight set to writing. At first it was just lines of nonsense, letting her mind speak freely on the page, keeping her thoughts focused on the concept of love, and how it connected to the magic of friendship itself. Amidst the writings, she took note of one musing- *Can an enemy be a friend?* So beside it, she scribbled- *Can an enemy be loved?*

"So, what are you going to do now?" Spike asked, peering over her shoulder.

Twilight closed the notebook and crossed her arms while hanging her head in thought. "I need to find my old old enemy."

"Enemy? But you don't have an enemy. Everyone loves you, Twilight." Spike asked, a little confused.

"No, but she thinks she's my enemy...So it's close enough."

...

"Are you sure about this, Twilight?" Spike asked as he and Twilight stood outside of a small flat near the center of Canterlot. It was small and humble on the outside, almost the exact opposite of the person they had come to visit.

"I have a hypothesis I want to test." Twilight said calmly, although she herself was uncertain how this was going to play out. "

"Alright, if you say so..." Spike took his cue and moved out of sight as Twilight approached the door and knocked. There was a long silence. Twilight knocked again. Finally the door opened some as a disheveled mane of white hair peered out at Twilight.

"Twilight Sparkle..." A rather annoyed voice called out, the door opening fully to reveal a blue pony, looking as though she had just now crawled out of bed. "To what does the great and powerful Trixie owe this sudden visit?"

"Hi, Trixie." Twilight said, maintaining a friendly tone and demeanor. "Did you want to get a coffee or something? My treat."

Chapter 3

There was a little coffee shop near the market in Canterlot, a rustic building made of brick and wood in contrast to the cities lavish gold and pearl splendor. It was a call back to the cities youth, before Nightmare Moon was banished more than thousand years ago, still maintained by the Roast family of Ponies. And it was here that Twilight Sparkle found herself, going over the menu with a feeling of fond memories, occasionally glancing over at the blue Unicorn across from her, who was scowling and eyeing Twilight with suspicion.

"What do you think? I used to come here for a little peace and quiet when exams came around. You wouldn't believe how noisy some ponies get when their grades are on the line." Twilight gave a soft laugh. Trixie wasn't quite so amused. "Er...Well, order whatever you like. I'm paying after all."

"The only reason I even fathomed joining you on this outing, Miss Sparkle, was because you offered to feed me." Trixie snatched up a menu and commenced to browsing, more than likely scouring for the priciest item there existed in the establishment. "Until then, I am willing to be civil."

"You mean, 'The Great and Powerful Trixie', right?" Twilight asked. Trixie lowered the menu, raising a brow at Twilight. "I mean...You always add that when you say 'I'."

"A wasted effort when it's just you, Twilight Sparkle." Trixie lowered her gaze back into the menu.

The waiter soon returned, "May I take your order, ladies?"

"Yes, I'll just have a hot tea, please, and a side salad." Twilight said.

"And I shall have the number seven drink special, and a slice of royal velvet carrot cake." Trixie announced. With that, the waiter left, leaving the two to an uncomfortable silence.

"Well..." Twilight scratched the back of her head, feeling the awkwardness start to settle. "Look, I know we got off on the wrong foot..." The statement seem to ignite a sudden fury in Trixie.

"Wrong foot!" Trixie leered at Twilight, pushing herself up with her hooves on the table. "I suppose you *could* call ruining someone's career getting off on the 'wrong foot'!"

"Shhhhhh!" A collective hush echoed through the café. Trixie wrinkled her nose and sat back down, her fervor still incited as she switched to a more quieter tone. "Because of the shenanigans in that podunk little village, I'm lucky if I can get a gig performing at children's birthday parties. Word of how I got showed up and exposed as a fraud by the legendary Twilight Sparkle," Trixie gestured with a theatrical flare, voice rising once more. "Banisher of the vile Nightmare Moon, spread like wildfire! Fraud is a very VERY powerful and venomous word in the entertainment business, Miss Sparkle!"

"Shhhh!" Another collective hush.

"Oh shush yourselves!" Trixie whinnied.

"Alright, alright..." Twilight raised her hooves for Trixie to be calm. "I would really pass the blame off on Snips and Snails...But if you want to blame me...That's fine..." If Trixie didn't seem so easy to fly off into hysterics, Twilight would have noted that Trixie had dug her own grave, and the two young foals and her own hubris were the shovels that did the digging. But that was not her intention. Her hypothesis still stood and waited to be proven, or disproven.

Trixie snorted as she eased back in her seat, waiting for the waiter to bring their drinks and snacks. Her expression softened from the piqued anger to simply frustrated. "No...I don't blame you, Twilight Sparkle...At least not for the whole Ursa Major thing. Just the fact you made me a fool at the highlight of the whole affair."

"Eh?" Twilight tilted her head as her hot tea with side salad and Trixie's double shot espresso with caramel sprinkles, and a swirl of coconut foam with a slice of...Okay that was not a slice, that was a small monument...cake arrived.

"Why didn't you just come up on stage with the rest of those backwater ponies and show me up before everything went to road apples?" Trixie wasted no time turning a sudden dark appetite on the cake slice, talking heatedly between bites. "I could have played it off then, I could have made it work in my favor and salvaged my career...Maybe we both could have made it work..." The frustration seemed to deepen in Trixie's eyes. "How was I supposed to know a true sorceress was in the crowd?" She uttered, wiping the frosting off her face.

Twilight's ears flattened against her head as she listened, taking silent sips of her tea. It was bitter. "I...didn't want anyone to think...I was being a braggart...I saw your act, and all the others could think was how showy and flashy you were being. I didn't want them to think the same about me. I was afraid."

Trixie grunted and stuck her nose in her coffee, getting whipped cream all over her snout. "Well, that's fine for you, Twilight Sparkle. You live this...perfectly idyllic life in Ponyville, while I'm stuck renting a hovel and living off snort-nosed foals' ability to be fooled by flashy lights."

Twilight sighed. "This isn't helping matters at all, is it?"

"No it isn't."

"Okay, look, how can I make it up to you?" Twilight asked.

"Perhaps you might explain why you're so interested in being so buddy-buddy with me all of a sudden. That would be a dovey start." Trixie crossed her arms, not yet making a move to wipe the cream from her snout.

The reason was Twilight's hypothesis...If it was possible for friendship and love to exist where originally there existed animosity and dislike. Trixie was perhaps the closest thing Twilight Sparkle had to an enemy, if not at least in Trixie's own eyes. There was also another reason. Perhaps where she had failed with colts, she could succeed with a mare. However...Twilight found herself in a delicate situation. Did she dare express her actual intentions of even coming to Canterlot? Trixie already seemed as though she had been dealt a sore hand since the last time they crossed paths, and the word 'sensitive' didn't quite express it. She took the time to sip her tea while thinking carefully of her approach.

"...Trixie, we only met once...And...I felt like there could have been a connection...You were only the second pony I'd seen in Ponyville that could use magic, so I was intrigued." Twilight found herself saying. She wasn't sure where she was going with this, but she wanted to try and reach Trixie through her ire. She looked up from her cup, "I didn't want there to be hard feelings, but you ran away before I could talk to you..."

Trixie watched Twilight, raising her mug to her face, her expression suddenly lost for words. Her eyes flicked left and right, as though measuring her own response. "Well...I admit...I did run off rather sudden..." She kept her eyes on the brown fluid in her cup, a blush creeping over her cheeks. "B-But don't tell me you came all this way after so long because you've been harboring some sort of silly crush or something!"

Trixie's response intrigued Twilight. Soft words seemed to have an effect on her. Twilight pondered. Something inside Twilight clicked. Trixie seemed so vulnerable now, or perhaps she always had been. She reached out a hoof and settled it over Trixie's, allowing a soft smile to cross her lips. "Trixie...I want to make things right...Between us..."

Was this what they called 'seduction'? Was this right? Did she really want to make things better? Or perhaps...Did she just want to know whether she could make her one and only self-proclaimed rival love her? The emotion was already there. Did Trixie think of Twilight whenever she performed? Did she curse her name? Anger was powerful, so was resentment...But in both of those, there was the element of fascination. Did Trixie dream of Twilight?

Trixie stared at the hoof that rested over hers for what seemed like an eternity, before suddenly drawing back as though the hoof was a viper. "You're having a go at me! Who put you up to this? Was it that apple picker?"

Okay...Maybe not so much.

"Madam, please, if you can't keep it down, we will have to ask you to leave..." The waiter announced calmly as he approached the table. Trixie looked around and noticed everyone was watching them. Her blush grew to furious intensity as she sunk into her seat.

"...I'll walk you home..." Twilight said softly.

...

Trixie's street got no sunlight this time of the day, the sun hidden behind the towers and mountains. The shadows made the buildings hugging Trixie's flat seem much taller and imposing. The whole walk back, Trixie kept her head down, nary a word spoken. Twice Twilight had tried to spark some conversation, but she felt that the damage was already done. When they got to her step, Trixie trotted up her door, turning to regard Twilight, her gaze questioningly.

"So, which is it, Twilight Sparkle?" She asked.

"Which is what?" Twilight asked in return.

"...Today. Did you really want to make things...b-better between us...or did those other ponies put you up to this to make me look like a fool?"

Twilight shook her head. "Today was just supposed to be about me and you, Trixie. No one else is involved."

"Then are you making a fool of me?"

"What do you mean?" Twilight asked.

Trixie blushed heavily once more and looked away. "Nothing! Obviously you've wasted your time coming here today, Twilight Sparkle." With that, Trixie turned and trotted into her home, slamming the door behind her.

"Trixie, I—" Twilight sighed as the door cut off her sentence. "I meant what I said, Trixie!" She huffed. "Stubborn mare..."

...

"So what was that?" Spike asked as they rendezvoused at the gates of Canterlot. He had observed from afar as Twilight worked with Trixie. "She looked like she was about to melt under your hoof there. "

"Well...I thought I had my hypothesis proven...But I think I learned something else today." Twilight mused as they walked, watching the sky.

"The heart is a delicate thing, and can be manipulated easily. Trixie was being held back by her insecurities and her pride. I think she still feels like she needs to put up a front. Maybe I crossed a line...I'm not sure. I really did want to make things better. But I guess that's up to her now."

"Twilight, can I ask you something?"

"Sure Spike. What's on your mind?"

"Do you...Like girls? Like that, I mean."

Twilight pondered silently as the valley stretched out before them for a few minutes. She smiled and let out a soft laugh. "I don't think I could choose one over another, Spike. I think any Pony is capable of love...Colt or Mare. As a researcher, it wouldn't be fair if I discriminated."

"I can live with that. So what now?" Spike asked.

"Good question. I guess I'll keep trying. Though I think I may need to actually ask Rarity some very specific questions..."

...

Trixie trotted into her bedroom, a museum of scrolls, tomes, and various parlor tricks strewn across the floor, and flopped onto her bed, emotionally exhausted.

"Stupid Twilight and her stupid nosiness and her stupid...stupid..." She grumbled into her pillow. Her cheeks were still hot from before. After a moment, she rolled onto her back, staring up at the star pattern printed on her ceiling. She replayed the last few hours in her mind...

'I want to make things right...between us'

Trixie felt the smile crack across her face, grasping her pillow tightly, and squealing with delight, hooves kicking into the air.

She sat, and turned a smug grin towards the newspaper clipping tacked to her wall, featuring a picture of Twilight, the headline reading 'local researcher thwarts Ursa Minor attack' in bold black letters.

"Challenge accepted, Twilight Sparkle! I, the great and powerful Trixie, Master Enchantress, will make you mine! And then this world will see the combined might of Equestria's greatest magicians!" The once quiet and sullen mood was now filled with laughter.

Chapter 4

Down on the Sweet Apple Acres farm, the harvest was finally coming to an end, and now came the collective task of all available farmhands for the yearly put-away. If there was one thing the Apple Family liked more than seeing their acreage bustling with harvest, was seeing it nice and tidy during the off season. No basket left astray, no plow unhitched.

Applejack was busying herself stowing the baskets away in the storage shed out back, sweating from the heat, and the exertion of a hard days work. She sighed with self satisfaction of a job well done when she finally crammed the last one in and wedged the door shut. It was then she was very aware of three sets of eyes watching her from a nearby hay bale.

"Well, howdy there, Cutie Mark Crusaders." She said cheerily, wiping her brow and adjusting her hat. "Come to give the farm some help?"

"Actually, Sis..." Applebloom said, Sweetie Bell and Scootaloo watching Applejack with wide eyed interest. "We were wonderin' if maybe we could make an inqueery."

"Well, sure sugarplum. What's got yer brain itchin'?" Applejack trotted over and took a load off, glad to take a break.

Scootaloo piped up. "We've been seeing Miss Twilight going around town with all these boys. She never hangs out with boys."

"Is she getting married?" Sweetie Bell asked.

"Ah...Well..." Applejack swallowed, raking her brain for an easy answer. "Y'see...Girls...There comes a time, in a young mares life when...Bein' with yer gal pals ain't enough." The Crusaders tilted their heads, blinking their big, pleading eyes. "Y'know...Miss Twilight is at that age where she don't think boys're icky any longer."

"Yuck." Scootaloo stuck her tongue out.

"Now, now, one day you'll understand what I mean." Applejack ruffled Scootaloo's mane. "It's all a part o' growin' up, just like yer Cutie Marks."

"But Twilight was looking so miserable some times. I don't think she was liking it all that well." Applebloom said. The other two nodded.

"Ah, right, well, we can all just blame Miss Rarity for that, but don't you go blabbin' to her I said that." Applejack said, looking to Sweetie Bell.

Sweetie Bell sat up and crossed her chest. "Cross my heart, hope to die, with a nice hot piece of apple pie!"

"Good. Now...Just between us girls..." Applejack huddled them close. "It ain't easy findin' that one colt you wanna always hang out with. You gotta go through a whole buncha bad apples before you find one that's fit fer eatin'. Those one's ya saw?"

"Those were bad apples?" Scootaloo asked.

Applejack nodded. "But you gotta through them before ya find the nice shiny red one."

Applebloom got quiet for a minute, before the light bulb in her head went off. "Maybe we could help! We'll find her a nice pony she can play with, and maybe we'll get our Match-Maker Cutie Marks!"

"Yea!" Scootaloo and Sweetie Bell were almost immediately on board. If it meant getting their Cutie Marks, it wasn't hard to convince them. They were already bound to leap off and get a plan into action, when Applejack snagged Applebloom by the tail.

"Now hold on there, young'ns!" She dragged them back to the hay bale. "Now, Miss Twilight ain't fond of people pokin' their noses into her affairs. Now I want you three to swear you won't go botherin' her."

Applebloom pouted at her big sister, but still sat up and put a hoof into the air. "I solemnly swear we won't go buggin' Miss Twilight." Scootaloo and Sweetie Bell looked at each other, then to Applebloom curiously, who shot them a glare. They immediately mimicked her pose, hooves in the air.

"Well, alright then. You three go play safe, and remember what we talked about." Applejack nodded and scuttled them off so she could get back to work.

...

"But Applebloom, I thought we weren't going to bug Miss Twilight." Sweetie Bell asked as the trio trotted their way across Ponyville to Twilights treehouse. "Applejack will be mighty angry that we lied."

"But we didn't lie!" Applebloom's said with an air of confidence. "We promised we wouldn't bug Twilight about her boy problem. We're gonna *help* her with her boy problem!"

"But...Won't that count as the same thing?" Scootaloo asked.

"Not if they don't know it was us. We'll be real sneaky about it! Like Ninjas!" Applebloom said.

"Ooh, Ninjas! Cool!" Scootaloo giggled. "...Can we just work on getting a Ninja Cutie Mark instead?"

...

The bell on the door to the Ponyville bookseller chimed, catching the attention of a blue Pegasus who was flopped over onto a bench, appearing to be feigning death, her mouth agape and tongue lolled out, legs scrunched up in the air like a cockroaches, her brightly multi-colored mane spread out in all directions.

"I wasn't in there that long." Twilight Sparkle nudged Rainbow Dash, as the Pegasus rolled onto her side and popping herself up on her elbow.

"Sheesh, you said you would just be a minute." Rainbow Dash huffed. "What's a minute in Canterlot? A half hour?"

"Well, I found what I was looking for, so I thought I'd look around a little longer." Twilights horn glowed as her book satchel slipped open, the newly acquired tome floating out. Rainbow Dash cocked her head to get a better look at the title, reading it aloud.

"...Unlocking your inner Celestia...A Mares guide to beauty, love, and being seductive without being..." She trailed off, narrowing her gaze at Twilight. "You spent bits on this."

Twilight turned his nose up, tucking the book away. "I don't have any other books on the subject, this one came highly recommended."

Rainbow dash sat up and spread her arms out, gathering Twilights attention her way. "Twi, what do you mean? You have all the reference you need right here! Me! Rainbow Dash! Your compadre! I can teach you all there is to know about dating and stuff!"

Twilight was incredulous at best. However, Rainbow Dash's tips couldn't be any more outlandish than Rarity's. She sighed with a smile and sat down on the bench beside Rainbow. "Very well, Master Dash, teach me the ways of love."

"I'm glad you asked." Rainbow Dash's ego was soaring. Being called Master Dash helped her along. "Firstly, be glad you're a filly. Love is our game. Boys will jump and fly through hoops of fire for a mare he likes. And all you have to do is sit back, and give him a smile and a pat on the head if he pleases you."

"That easy huh?" Twilight giggled. "But what if no one's begging for my attention?"

"Easy peasy! That's another benefit of being a girl. A guy can't be aggressive, because it makes him look like a bully. However, a girl *can* be aggressive and just walk up on a guy and go..." Rainbow Dash pointed in front of her while looking at Twilight with a grin "hey! You, me, tonight at the Dance Club, bring a saddle, pony!"

"I....Um.....I...I-I don't own a saddle..." A soft, trembling whisper answered Rainbow Dash. She looked at where she was pointing, seeing a very startled and blushing Fluttershy. Coincidentally, Rainbow Dash took notice that maybe she was speaking with a bit too much bravado, as she had quite a few eyes in the market square staring at her calling Fluttershy out on a date.

"See? I told you." A lady Pegasus nudged her companion as they trotted away, everyone else following their lead. Rainbow Dash felt her brain go

into a hard shutdown and her face redden, miraculously at a loss for words. Fluttershy trotted over by Twilight, her head bowed timidly.

"...Should I still get a saddle?" She asked, blushing delicately.

...

Back at Twilights house, the Cutie Mark Crusaders began phase one of their operation- Intel gathering. If Twilight was on the dating scene, then they needed to get a feel for her personality without going to her directly and asking a lot of questions that would make them seem all the more suspicious in their intentions. She was neat, tidy, loved books, and was a great public organizer. That was the extent of their knowledge of Twilight Sparkle as a pony, despite Sweetie Belles insistence that Twilight was "also really really nice" counted along that list.

There was one obstacle in their path...Spike.

"How are we gonna get past the dragon?" Scootaloo asked as they formed a huddle in the bushes outside the tree house. "He's not gonna just let us in and start snooping around, you know."

"None to worry, Crusaders." Applebloom grinned with certainty. "If it's one thing I know about Spike, is that he likes to run his mouth more than like an auctioneer selling off a few hundred heads of livestock." She quickly turned her head to Sweetie Belle. "Sweetie Belle, you're gonna have to keep him busy while we sneak in and have a rustlin' about inside."

"Me?" Sweetie Belle cowered back some. "Why does it gotta be me? What am I gonna talk to him about?"

...

"...Well, y'know..." Spike puffed up his chest proudly, leaning in the doorway as Sweetie Belle stood on the step, smiling as best she could. "I had wanted to do a full beard, and see if Rarity liked it like that. I always figured she might have a fancy for more distinguished gentlemen."

"Oh yes, she adores handsome gentlemen!" Sweetie Belle leaned slightly to glance inside, barely catching a glimpse of Applebloom sneaking around

in the background and Scootaloo rummaging a book case. "So tell me, Spike, how do you keep your scales so shiny?"

"Oh, that's a secret for most Dragons, but just between you and me? I get up real early, and find the fattest frog I can find." Spike droned on, indulging Sweetie Belles faux-interest. She just nodded, wearing the biggest, cheesiest smile she could muster. Eventually, she spied Applebloom waving what looked to be a scrap of paper over her head in a silent but enthusiastic manner before disappearing towards the window they had snuck in.

"And that's my morning regimen." Spinke concluded, folding his arms and nodding.

"That's fantastic! Hey, listen, I have to run, but I will definitely talk to Rarity about what she thinks about beards." Sweetie Belle glanced aside, waiting to see two little figures dart into the bushes. "So when I hear her opinion of beards, and then I will...tell you how she feels...about beards...and then you can grow a beard...and...IGOTTAGOBYE!" Spike blinked as he found himself staring at a foal-shaped cloud where Sweetie Belle had been.

"Huh...Musta had to use the bathroom. Oh, well, back to work..." Spike closed the door. "...Hey, I thought I put these books away..."

...

"Oh gosh, you guys, what took you so long?" Sweetie Belle panted for breath when she arrived at the rendezvous spot.

"Sorry, Sweetie Belle...Scoot here almost tripped and crashed out the window." Applebloom nudged Scootaloo.

"I got my hoof caught! Give me a break! So whatcha find?" Scootaloo turned her interest to the piece of paper Applebloom grasped.

"Is that it...? Is that all you found?" Sweetie Belle sighed exasperatedly.

"This is all we need girls. Behold, a list o' names of people Twilight wants to date! I found it under her big journal thing. Now lessee..." The three crowded around, eyes following the list of names.

"I don't even know half these ponies. Are you sure this is the right list and not her Winter-Wrap-Up roll call sheet from last winter?" Scootaloo picked it up and looked it all over, her interest sparked by the scribbling on the back. "Ooh, what's this..." She read aloud, "Weird...'Can my enemy be my friend?'..."

"Tarnation...?" Applebloom peaked. "Trixie...? Ain't that that no good snakewater salespony that came through some time back? Why would Twilight wanna go with a phonypony like that?"

"Hey, Applebloom! Look, your brothers name is here!" Sweetie Belle pointed out the name "Big Mac" next to the scribble of 'A friend can also be a lover?'.

Applebloom squealed. "Twilight likes Big Macintosh! Omigosh! This is it!"

"What is it?" Scootaloo asked, the suspense killing her.

"We'll set up Twilight with ma big brother! It's perfect! "

"B-but..." Sweetie Belle lowered her head, looking sheepish. "...But Twilight so small...and Big Mac is....so big..."

"Where is your mind, Sweetie Belle?" Scootaloo looked her friend over with concern.

...

Once Rainbow Dash had regained her composure after the embarrassing incident from before, she had finally gotten around to showing Twilight what she had dragged her out for in the first place- with Fluttershy as the polite tagalong. On the northern outskirt of Ponyville, an area of acreage was being developed, Pegasus moving in a flurry of activity, in the process of erecting large hoops and ramps, and strange spiraling structures that Twilight wasn't sure what purpose they served.

"They're building an amusement park on Old Mr. Seesaws property?" She asked. Rainbow dash shook her head, unable to contain her excitement as she hurried over to a posted notice tacked to a pole, thrusting her hoof at it. It read "Future Site of the Wonderbolts Summer Training Facility." Twilight read aloud.

"Isn't it awesome?" Rainbow Dash fluttered her wings and squealing. "The Wonderbolts are gonna be in Ponyville all Summer! Every Summer! This is my chance, you guys! This is THE chance! The Wonderbolts, in my own backyard!"

"Oh...I hope they won't be too noisy...The surrounding woods is a home to a lot of little woodlands families..." Fluttershy said in a worried tone, already fearing the poor bunnies and squirrels, suffering sore ears from the loud sounds of the famous Pegasus flying group.

"Wha...?" Rainbow Dash deflated some. "This is my big chance to get into the Wonderbolts, and you're worried about the animals?"

"Sorry..." Fluttershy flattened her ears.

"Well, I'm happy for you, Rainbow Dash. Maybe all your hard work will finally get some recognition huh?" Twilight smiled reassuringly, giving Rainbow back a little bit of her excitement.

"No sweat, Twilight! I'll really show them what I got! I've been working on a new routine ever since the Young Flyers Competition, and it is fool proof and made of 20% awesome!"

"Only 20%?" Twilight asked, cocking a brow. "What's the other 80%?"

Before Rainbow Dash could answer, all three looked up as the sound of flapping wings became evident, giving Rainbow just a fraction of a second to dive out of the way before a grey and blond mailmare crashed between the three.

"Mailtime!" Derpy Hooves announced as she galloped back to onto her hooves, swaying some before Rainbow caught her and straightened her up. The walleyed mare fished around in her little satchel and produced a letter, "Letter for Mr. Spackle?"

"Umm...You mean, Sparkle?" Twilight asked, trying to sound pleasant.

"Iunno!" Derpy shrugged, laughing a bit before handing it over to Twilight, and scooting off into the sky.

"Dimwitted filly...She's gonna hurt someone one day." Rainbow growled.
"So what is it, Twilight?"

Twilight's horn glowed as she opened the envelope and unfolded the paper within. "...Dear Miss Twilight...I have taken notice of you, but you probably have not taken notice of me...If you would, it would honor me greatly if you would accompany me to a social gathering tonight at the Sugarcube Bakery after sunset...Sincerely, a Secret Admirer?" Twilight blinked.

"Sounds creepy. I'd throw it away or somethin'." Rainbow Dash said, but then she noticed a look of utter delight in Twilight's eyes.

"I have a secret admirer?" Twilight asked, though it wasn't directed to anyone in particular. "I have a secret admirer!"

"Oh you can't be serious..." Rainbow Dash hung her head and narrowed her eyes.

"No, I think she is, Rainbow Dash." Fluttershy said, nodding her head.

...

"Hey, Big Brother!" Applejack came trotting up the trail to where the big red stallion known as Big Macintosh was hauling a wagon of equipment back to the storage shed. "Mail call!"

Big Mac brought the wagon to a halt, shrugging himself out of the harness and taking a load off and stretching his legs. "Probably nothing of too much import." He said lazily as Applejack fished some letters out of her saddlebag.

"Ptooe...Lessee...Bill...Irrigation notice...Now where was it...Ah here it is, ya got a letter from...Ah-non-ee-moose. Anonymouse?" Applejack screwed her eyes, trying to make out the word she had never seen before on the simple white envelope.

"An anonymous letter, for me?" Big Mac pulled it over to him and ripped the letter open with his teeth, easing back against the wagon as he read silently to himself.

'Dear Mr Macintosh.

I wish I could have delivered this invitation in person, however I found myself too shy to carry through, however I hope you will accept. I am attending a small social gathering at the Sugarcube Bakery tonight, and I hope I will be able to make your acquaintance...

Sincerely, a secret admirer'

"Well, what is it? Who's this Aninny Mouse and why is he sendin' letters?" Applejack asked.

Big Mac tucked the letter away and began hitching himself back up to his wagon. "T'ain't polite to inquire on another ponies correspondence, li'l sis." He said simply, bending down to snag a thistle to chew on as he carried on.

"Oh well fine, party pooper. I gotta get these over to Granny." Applejack huffed and started the other way.

That handwritin' was awful familiar... Big Mac thought to himself. *I wonder what all this is about?*

Chapter 5

As late evening fell over Ponyville, Twilight Sparkle trotted along her way to attend the social gathering being held at Sugarcube Corner, for what she was certain pertained to something Pinkie Pie related, as well as to meet her Secret Admirer. She was positively giddy, reflected in each spring of her step, the midnight blue hooded cape she wore bouncing with her. Her mane swaying as she hummed along, the gold star hairpin catching the light of streetlamps as she passed.

As she drew closer to her destination, she spied a large group of people gathered outside, and the high pitched sound of Pinkie Pie herself addressing the crowd in song. Pinkie Pie was dressed in a dress coat, red cummerbund, bowtie, and a fake moustache. Twilight also noticed Mr. and Mrs. Cake by the doors, dressed just as fancily, Mr. Cake in a bowler hat and tie, and Mrs. Cake in an evening dress.

"—And there's one more rule, to tell the truth, so as to not look so uncouth!" Pinkie Pie sang, bouncing around with all the style and dynamic energy she was known for, "When you eat, please don't pout! Alwayyyysssss stick your pinkie ouuuuutttt!" She finished by sliding on her knee's across the step, and taking a bow.

The crowd applauded, and Pinkie sprang up, announcing that the festivities had begun with a verbose "Let's PAR-TAY!" The crowd filed in after her, Mr. and Mrs. Cake passing out monocles and top hats to everyone. Twilight could only smile and shake her head.

"Good evening, Miss Sparkle!" Mr. Cake said cheerily, offering a monocle and top hat to the Unicorn. She politely declined.

"Thank you, but I'm waiting for my date to arrive...He might not see me in this sea of..." Twilight glanced past the door, seeing the crowd of black and grey head adornments. "...Top hats..." Mrs. Cake laughed softly seeing her confusion.

"Pinkie Pie met our cousin from Manehattan yesterday, and decided she wanted to try throwing a high class affair. It's a lovely change of pace, don't you think? You look lovely yourself tonight, as well! You'll fit right in."

"Thank you, Mrs. Cake...I'll be by the punch bowl in case someone comes asking for me, okay?" Twilight trotted in, glancing around for anyone that might take notice of her, almost crashing directly into a smartly dressed Applejack.

"Whoa there, filly! Where ya goin' in a hurry?" Applejack asked., smoothing out her red vest and bow tie.

"Ah, Applejack! What an outfit..." Twilight tilted her head, seeing other ponies dressed similarly.

"Nice, ain't it?" Applejack beamed. "Pinkie Pie said she was short handed for Metro D personnel, whatever that is. Fancy talk for Waiter? So, me and some others are pickin' up the slack."

"Wow...I didn't think Pinkie Pie had this kind of class in her." Twilight didn't want to admit it, but this sort of fancy soiree was not the sort of thing that came to mind when she thought of the ex-rock farmer-turned full time party organizer. Firstly, there wasn't a pink balloon in sight...

"I think it's a sign of maturity." Applejack nodded in an approving manner. "Now what's with you comin' in lookin' all spiffy and sparkly? Here on another date, I reckon."

"Well...Yeah, you could say that. I...Got a secret admirer letter inviting me out here tonight!" Twilight explained.

"Fancy that. Big Macintosh had a last minute somethin' er other tonight too. Well, I gotta get back to work! Have fun now...Oh, and Twilight?" Applejack leaned close. "Pinkie Pie means business when she says ta stick out yer pinky..."

"...But..." Twilight was about to note that ponies didn't have pinky fingers.

"Business." Applejack said with a deadly serious tone, before smiling brightly. "Enjoy yerself, y'hear?"

...

Pinkie Pie was in full mode, bouncing from wall to wall, keeping a sharp lookout for anyone who might be losing any levels on the fun meter. Also to snag the odd cake and cookie spread out. She could not have been more pleased with her first Fancy Party. Top hats for as far as the eye could see. Then she spied the un-hatted head of Twilight Sparkle, one of her many friend of friends, standing alone by the punch bowl, looking around with intent and searching.

"Twilight! How ya doin'? Whatcha doin' standing here all by your lonesome? Are you lonely? How can you be lonely with some many fancy people around?" Pinkie Pie sprang upon Twilight.

"Ah!" Twilight nearly spilled her punch, the pink earth pony leaning in a little too close than she was comfortable with, a total invasion of the personal bubble. "Pinkie Pie, hello, I-"

"Ahem..." Pinkie Pie stood on her tip toes, turning her nose up.

"Pinkie?" Twilight blinked. Pinkie Pie turned her head away. Twilight scratched her head a bit, before it dawned on her. "Miss Pinkamena?" Pinkie Pie's smile returned in full force. "Er...Yes, I'm actually waiting for someone...I have a date tonight."

"A date?" Pinkie nearly exploded with enthusiasm. "Oh wow! I've never had a date at one of my parties! Is he cute? Are you gonna marry him? Can I cater your wedding? Can I be the minister at your wedding? Can I be your foals godpony?"

"Er..." Twilight glanced around, looking for an exit. Fortunately, Applejack was en route to intercept.

"Pinkie, will you leave..." Applejack then received a glare from Pinkie. Applejack sighed and spoke in a dull monotone. "Miss Pinkamena Diane Pie, your presence is required over at the DJ table."

Pinkie Pie squealed when she saw the time. "It's time for me to bust some jams! Talk to ya later, Twilight! Have fun smooching your date!" And with that she was gone, a few eyes falling on Twilight who put a hoof to her forehead.

"Oi."

It was then, Twilight looked over and saw Big Macintosh at the door, protesting the receiving of a top hat to replace his white Stetson hat, looking sharp in his tan, polished boots. He and Mr. Cake talked for a moment, before Mr. Cake looked in and nodded in Twilights direction. Twilights eyes lit up as hers met Big Macs. Both looked to each other with a curiosity, and suddenly a realization. A smile cut across Macintosh's usually docile face as he entered, straightening back his hat.

Applejack followed her friends suddenly dumbfounded gaze, and saw Big Mac making a line straight for Twilight. "Oh, my tarnation of tarnations..."

"M-Macintosh...Good evening." Twilight lowered her head in greeting.

"Miss Twilight." Macintosh nodded. He smiled at Applejack. "Li'l Sis."

The two looked at each other for a moment, unable to find what to say.

"So, I..." They both said in unison.

"I was just..." Again, in sync with each other. After a moment, they just chose to laugh.

"Well!" Applejack cleared her throat. "Macintosh, where's yer manners? Go fetch yer lady friend something to nibble on."

"Ah, right." Macintosh nodded to the both of them, turning to trot off towards the tables of treats, almost being swallowed by the sea of top hats. Once he was out of sight, Applejack put a leg over Twilight.

"Can I have a moment to bend yer ear...?" There was something just a touch too sweet about her voice that made a shiver go up Twilight's spine.

"S-sure...?" Twilight walked to the corner with Applejack.

"...Now, ya know yer mah friend and I love ya dearly..." Applejack began. "See, I know you're really into this dating scene right now, but...That's ma brother there, sugarcube...I love him more than life itself."

Twilight just nodded. "I know..."

"That means...That it will not settle well if you go and fiddle faddle with him like you've been doin' with some of these other boys...Savvy?" Applejacks voice was touching on creepily cheerful.

"Absolutely." Twilight nodded with enthusiasm. "No fiddle faddle whatsoever."

"Good. Y'all have a good time." Applejack ruffled Twilight mane and turned to leave. She paused and glanced back, her tone deadly serious like before with the warning about the pinky finger. "...I'm serious. Do him wrong, and I'll shave the mane off yer head."

...

Macintosh returned with two plates balanced on his back, finding Twilight fidgeting nervously back by the punch. She was rather cute when she was nervous, he reckoned. She fit the shyness she mentioned in her letter.

Well, lets just set her at ease... Macintosh thought as he set her plate aside. "Well, then...You look mighty pretty tonight, Miss Twilight." Twilight blushed some and shyly swayed the hem of her cape.

"Oh, this? Well...I wanted to look nice for tonight...You look pretty sharp yourself. Ooh...These cupcakes look delicious..." Applejacks threat was quickly forgotten when Twilight eyed the baked delights Pinkie Pie had prepared. She was about to help herself when she noticed said earth pony watching her intently from under the table. With a nervous laugh, she twisted her hoof slightly before taking a bite. Satisfied, Pinkie Pie vanished.

"Hm?" Macintosh tilted his head curiously.

"Oh, uh...Pinky out." Twilight said sheepishly. Macintosh smiled and gave a soft laugh, however he made sure the coast was clear as he deftly defied the laws of Pinkie, and popped a cupcake into his mouth without the required gestures. Twilight snickered.

"Keep it up, big boy, and you're going to get it." She warned with humor.

"I've had a good run." He grinned as he chewed.

Once they were done eating, and some mild chit chat later, they heard Pinkie Pie announce she was about to drop the phat beats. However, since this was a fancy hat and monocle party, the phat beats were set to classical music, and a laugh was had by all when Pinkie Pie worked the record player, scratching like a pro.

"So...Wanna dance?" Twilight asked. Macintosh shrugged a bit and got to his feet.

"T'aint no square dance, but I think I got some moves in me..."

And so, the ponies danced.

...

Twilight fell into her seat laughing and wiping a bit of sweat from her brow. "Oh, my goodness...I haven't danced like that since I was a foal...I am so going to feel that in the morning..."

"You cut a rug fine, Miss Twilight. Pardon if my big ol' flank knocked ya around some." Macintosh stretched and sat beside her, tucking his front hooves under him. The two sat there, catching their breath while all the couples enjoyed a slow dance...in which Pinkie Pie took to the dance floor with a broom she fondly called Brian.

"So...Twilight..." Macintosh cleared his throat, "That letter o' yours...must have been somethin' to get all that out." Twilight blinked.

"I was about to say the same about your letter. How you...Fancied me from afar?" Twilight leaned up against the red work horse, giving him a coy smile. She blinked and looked up at him. "...My letter?"

"Well, yeah, about you bein' too shy to ask me...Oh..." Macintosh began, it suddenly dawning on them. If she hadn't, and he hadn't...Both looked at each other and looked away sheepishly. Finally Macintosh broke the silence. "You wanna get outta here?"

...

Applejack peered out the window, watching as Twilight and Macintosh took their leave. *Good luck, you two.* She smiled and sighed, turning to suddenly see Pinkie Pie there.

"Hey, where's Twilight and Lover Boy?" Pinkie asked. "We're about to start the conga line!"

...

"So...who do you think did it?" Twilight asked as the two strolled along the lamp-lit path near the Ponyville pond. She was feeling sheepish, but not too sheepish. She was actually enjoying herself.

"No idear." Macintosh still had his humor about him as well. "Ah, Miss Twilight...your hair clip."

Twilight pawed at her mane, finding that her gold star had fallen off. "Oh no...It must have fallen off while we were dancing...It's probably gotten trampled by now..." It wasn't an expensive hair pin, but it was her favorite.

"Here, let's fix that real quick..." Macintosh trotted over to the edge of the path and returned with a yellow flower, placing it gently in her mane. "There. Much better." Twilight felt herself turn red and smiled thankfully.

...

"—And so she comes running in after all the animals, screaming YOU'RE ALL GONNA LOVE ME!" Twilight whinnied in a crazed shrill voice, making a face to match. Macintosh snorted as a laugh escaped, finding it near impossible to imagine someone as docile as Fluttershy snapping just because a fuzzy animal didn't show her the time of day.

Twilight herself laughed with him, pausing to look up at the full moon as it hovered over her home, a silhouette against a night sky that matched her cape. "Macintosh...even though tonight wasn't our idea...I had a really good time."

"It was my honor, Miss Twilight." Macintosh nodded to her. Twilight smiled and stood up on the tips of her hooves, kissing Macintosh softly. He was briefly taken aback by her sudden forwardness. Twilight simply smiled and

lowered her head in another imitation of Fluttershy, another blush creeping across her cheeks.

"It's what you do at the end of a date...y'know?"

Macintosh smirked, bending down and returned the favor. This time, the kiss lingered. When they finally pulled apart, they gazed into each other's eyes; Macintosh's reflecting the shimmering stars shining in Twilights.

"Goodnight, Macintosh..."

"Goodnight, Miss Twilight..."

...

As the two parted ways, back to their homes for the night, both were too wrapped up in their own thoughts to give credence to the notion that they had been watched. A lone figure sat perched on the roof of a home not far from Twilights dwelling, a cloak imprinted with stars and a big floppy hat swaying in the nightly breeze.

"How adorable, the backwater workhorse thinks he has a hand to play against me?" Trixie raised a hoof to her lips to mask a chuckle. "One pony...two ponies...a hundred...It doesn't matter how many stand between me and you, Twilight Sparkle...The Great and Powerful Trixie shall have you!" She tossed her head back and laughed.

"Hey, Great and Powerful Trixie!" A pony stuck his head out the window just under her perch, "You mind keeping it down?"

"Shush you!" Trixie snapped. "I'm not done gloating." Trixie opened her mouth to speak, but found no words. "Alright, maybe I was..." She turned to the pony with a dignified countenance. "My good sir, the ladder I used to ascend your dwelling fell when I got up here...Might I beseech you to retrieve it so I may descend?"

Chapter 6

The next morning found Twilight Sparkle with more of a spring in her step and a song on her lips as she went about arranging the brunch she and the other six mares were having, as was their custom on Saturdays most weeks. The brunch was set in rotation as to which of the six's home it would be held, with the exception of Rainbow Dash, since the Flying spell at Twilight's disposal was a total drain on one pony, let alone the four that were without the ability to walk on clouds. Thus, Rainbow Dash was exempt from brunch hostess duty, which the pegasus reveled in.

As expected, when Fluttershy, Rainbow Dash, Rarity, and Applejack arrived, they all seemed very eager to hear how things went with Big Macintosh the night before. More so Applejack, who literally greeted Twilight at her door with inquiries of how it went, whether or not Big Mac had...as she put..."gotten cloppy with her", promising to "wax his hide" if he had.

Of course, Twilight assured her that Macintosh had been a perfect gentlepony.

Rarity and Fluttershy were about to bombard Twilight with their inquiries, when Rainbow Dash interjected.

"Girls, can we PLEASE eat something first before we start talking about all this lovey dovey stuff? I skipped breakfast for this!"

"Hold yer horses, Dash. Let's wait fer Pinkie Pie to get here." Applejack raised a hoof for Rainbow Dash to calm down some. "She's goin' through rough edges right now."

"Oh? What happened? Did her party not end well?" Twilight asked, very concerned. Very rarely did any party of Pinkie Pie's end on a sour note.

"Oh no, darlin', it was a success all'round." Applejack said reassuringly, rolling her eyes some. "...But at the end o' the night after we cleaned up, she caught 'Brian' in the closet with a mop. She...didn't take it well."

"Oh...The broom..." Twilight recalled, laughing softly. "Well...As her friends, let's show her our support, of course..."

"Support for what?" Pinkie Pie asked from where she was sitting between Rarity and Fluttershy. Both adjoining mares let out a frightened cry, as Pinkie Pie looked around, holding one of the sandwiches from Twilights table, and the aforementioned broom in the other, the broom itself sporting a necktie. "What?"

"Ah, er...Pinkie..." Applejack cleared her throat nervously. "I see you and Brian got back together."

Pinkie smiled big and radiantly, nodding wildly as she hugged the broom close. "Oh, you betcha! He told he it was all a mistake and he'll never look at another mop as long as he lives! He even pinky-sweared!"

"Right..." Twilight and Applejack said in unison. Twilight scratched the back of her head, smiling with some unease. "Well...let's eat."

...

"Ah...I have had sufficient..." Rainbow Dash flopped back, rubbing a satisfied belly while the others sat around sipping tea and discussing the topic of the day, Fluttershy and Rarity in particular looking to Twilight with stars in their eyes.

"I'm so happy it went well, Twilight." Fluttershy said. "You two are so cute together!"

"Oh, indeed, dear. The posh city mare and the worldly and hardworking field stallion!" Rarity squealed. "It's just like in my book-"

"Oh no you don't, Rarity." Applejack butted in, "Do not be draggin' yer clop novels into this." The two gave each other hard glares before turning away from each other with a 'humph'. "Anyway...Twilight...I'll have you know I found the culprit who done sent those letters."

"O-oh?" Twilight sipped from her tea, giving Applejack a inquisitive look.

"Applebloom was being a touch too interested in how Big Mac's date went." Applejack smirked some. "She tried to skirt the issue, but I eventually just

sat on her and threatened to put applesauce in her mane if she didn't spill the beans. She would like to deliver a formal apology when she is no longer grounded."

"Oh, really, there's no need. No harm done...In fact, I'm glad she did it. I had a really good time." Everyone watched as Twilight started to redden again.

"Oooh, did you kiss?" Pinkie Pie asked, bouncing in her seat.

"Now, Pinkie that's...did ya?" Applejack couldn't deny curiosity.

Fluttershy and Rarity merely leaned forward, expectant expressions presented.

"Well...I-" Twilight started...then came a knock at the door. *Oh, thank you, Celestia...* "Oh, who could that be? I'll be right back, girls." Twilight hopped up and trotted to her front door.

...

As soon as the door was opened but a crack, an eruption of blue smoke blew the door open, sparklers and firecrackers going off in mid air, causing Twilight to gallop back some in surprise. Through the smoke, a figure appeared, dressed in her magicians garb...

"Twilight Sparkle, the Great and Powerful Trixie has arrived!" Trixie announced with theatrical bravado, granting herself entry. "Oh, my how quaint...It's not entirely how I envisioned your home to be."

"Ah, well, come on in, we were-" Twilight motioned to the others, who were watching with both a mix of surprise of the sudden visitation, and Rarity and Fluttershy restraining Rainbow Dash and Applejack from, by sheer instinct, wanting to pummel Trixie.

"-I've been thinking, Miss Sparkle, about what we talked about last time." Trixie turned and faced Twilight, her tone calm, maybe even airy. "And...I came to a decision, and I agree. We shouldn't be enemies. I was foolish and angry at the time, but now my eyes are open, and I finally know what it is that I want to do."

"R-really?" Twilight blinked, before smiling some with a light sigh. "...I'm glad Trixie. I apologize if maybe I came on too strong for you..."

"Yes, well, about that..."

...

"Lemme go! I still owe her one!" Rainbow Dash grunted in a hushed tone as she struggled underneath Pinkie Pie, who had taken to sitting on her.

"Rainbow Dash, no." Rarity hissed, while using her Unicorn magic to cement Applejack firmly in place, the farm pony herself glaring daggers at the magician. "Let's let Twilight handle this."

...

Trixie fluttered her eyes at Twilight, removing her hat and tossing it on the nearby rack by the door. "Twilight, I want to be perfectly upfront and honest with you." Trixie's tone turned direct and serious. "I want to make out with you so direly that it is literally causing me physical pain for every second my lips are not pressed against yours."

Twilight, her whole face turning red in contrast to the rest of her purple frame, opened her mouth to respond when the powder blue Unicorn sprang upon her, whatever words she meant to say lost as Trixie's lips came upon hers, legs wrapping around and hooves holding her tight.

...

Across the room, five jaws hit the floor simultaneously, and a broom hit the floor.

...The feeling was so different from when Macintosh had kissed her. Twilight's mind went blank as Trixie pressed her up against the wall. Her kiss tasted of longing, and maybe oats. Toasted oats, with a hint of honey. The feeling sent shivers down her spine. It felt...wonderful.

When the kiss was broken, it left both fillies panting for breath, staring into each other's eyes, that Twilight had nearly forgotten her present company until she heard a rather irate drawl come from her living room.

"...Twilight..." Applejack huffed, fire in her eyes. "...You mind explainin' what in the hay?"

Trixie suddenly became aware of the five over ponies in the room. "Oh, you have guests..."

"A-Applejack, this isn't what it looks like..." Twilight said, not really making a move to break Trixie's embrace.

Trixie tilted her head, still with a playful nature. "Is it not? Am I not being forward enough...?" Trixie drew close to capture Twilight's lips again.

"Alright right, that does it!" Rainbow Dash broke free of Pinkie Pie and made straight for Trixie, Pinkie Pie clinging to one hind leg, squealing that 'violence is bad!', "Get yer hooves off Twilight, you two bit show pony!" Trixie swerved behind Twilight as the Pegasus came about, eyeing her over Twilight's shoulder.

"Rainbow Dash, please...there's no need for that." Twilight raised her hooves to call for peace, Trixie's legs still wrapped around her from behind.. "Let me explain..."

...

And so, Twilight explained her visit to Canterlot, and her visit with Trixie. A visit that was meant to smooth out their differences, and perhaps grow more acquainted. However she failed to confess how close to amorous the visit had come before Trixie's reaction.

"It is as dear Twilight says." Trixie declared as she sat beside Twilight as the group reconvened in the living room. "I hesitated at first, but lo, I, the Great and Powerful Trixie, have come to confess her feelings for Twilight, of undying love!"

"Oh barf." Rainbow Dash crossed her arms and huffed.

"Well, I hate to be the bearer of bad news, missy." Applejack motioned to Twilight. "But she just so happens to be datin' my brother!"

"Applejack..." Twilight was about to make note that it had been only one date, but Trixie interjected.

"Oh, you mean that workhorse I saw last night?" Trixie put a hoof to her chest and let out a laugh. "You cannot possibly believe that such a simple earth pony is capable of besting the Great and Powerful Trixie for Twilights affections..."

"Well, I wouldn't like to boast..." A voice came from the door, which had been left wide open. There stood Big Macintosh, carrying a small gold star between his teeth. Giving Trixie a curious, if not suspicious glance, he trotted in and set the star beside Twilight. Trixie glared as the red stallion nuzzled Twilight.

"Here, I found yer hairclip, Miss Twilight."

Twilight smiled with appreciation, once more blushing at the sudden display of affection. She then noticed that both Trixie and Big Macintosh were giving each other looks. The kind of look that indicated they were sizing each other up. How much from the doorway had Big Mac heard?

"Macintosh. Folks just call me Mac. And you are...?" Big Mac offered a hoof.

Trixie turned up her nose and shook his hoof in as elegant a manner as a hoof could be shook. "The Great and Powerful Trixie...Magician and scholar. The pleasure is all mine, I'm sure." They continued shaking hooves, eyes never leaving the other, as though war would indeed erupt once the hooves separated.

"Well!" Twilight let out an exasperated laugh, looking from them to her friends who were watching on with curiosity as to how this was going to play out. Rainbow Dash and Applejack seemed set to step in if things got volatile, Fluttershy and Rarity seemed very rapt in the sudden drama, and Pinkie Pie...had disappeared with her broom. "I'm going to go make some more tea! Rarity! Come help me!"

"Oh, but I-" Rarity was about to protest turning away from such a spectacle, but then she saw the annoyed pleading in Twilights eyes. "Of course dear...Trixie...darling..." an obviously forced sentiment, "How do you take your tea...?"

"However Twilight chooses." Trixie said smugly.

"I see...Macintosh?" Rarity asked.

"I'm fine, ma'am, thanks fer asking." Big Mac said, not even turning his head.

"Of course...well then..."

...

"What am I going to do!" Twilight flatted her face against the counter in her kitchen, hooves stuffed into her mane.

"Well, whatever it is, it should be executed quickly." Rarity set about preparing said tea. "Why didn't you tell us about Trixie, Twilight? What's more," She leaned in towards Twilight, taking on an annoyed tone. "Why Trixie?"

Twilight hung her head, looking up at Rarity with big eyes. "...Promise you won't get mad?"

Rarity nodded. Twilight sighed and explained everything, her hypothesis of turning a rival into a friend, and whether love could exist where once there was hostility. When she was done, Rarity had a hoof between her eyes, and was shaking her head with dismay.

"...Oh Twilight..." Rarity said with great distress. "...You don't actually love this girl...and yet you tagged her along to prove a point...?"

"No, no it's not like that!" Twilight raised her hooves defensively. "....I mean...Maybe...It started out like that..." Twilight began doing her Fluttershy impersonation again. "...When I saw what Trixie was like when not trying to impress someone...And saw what my actions had done to her..."

"The Ursa Minor?" Rarity asked. "Twilight, she brought that on herself, dear. You can't blame yourself for that."

"It cost her everything, Rarity...It..." Twilight sucked in a breath, slowly letting it out. "...Remember what you said once about Unicorn magic...?"

Rarity tilted her head a moment, before her eyes lit up some with recalling. "...That it doesn't happen without a reason..."

Twilight nodded. "That day...I felt some of that magic...like me and Trixie...fit together somehow...I can't explain it...I wanted to be close to her...I wanted...to help her...But then...She rejected me. She thought I was making fun of her. Like it was all a plot between us six."

"Paranoid much?" Rarity chuckled lightly as she put a kettle on for the tea.

"...So, I let it go...I thought maybe I'd insulted her...I didn't think she actually-" Twilight paused and strained an ear, Rarity following suit, eyes narrowing as they heard the sound of raised and agitated voices.

...

"Oh, spare me, Mr. Macintosh!" Trixie growled, standing up on her rear hooves to see eye to eye with Macintosh, poking him in the chest. "What do you possibly have to offer a lady of Princess Celestia's court?"

"Everything that I can give, Miss Trixie." Macintosh's voice was straining to maintain that humble civility of his nature, but Trixie was greatly starting to whittle at it. "My love, the fruits of my labor, a roof over her head, and all the comforts that come with it. How about yourself?"

The other mares watched on, even Applejack finding herself unwilling to step into the proximity of her brothers incited temper. Rainbow Dash herself sulked in a corner after receiving a dual-pointed "Butt Out" from the two quarreling suitors when she had tried to come between them.

"Tell me, Mr. Macintosh, can you truly appreciate Twilight ? Hmm?" Trixie turned up her head haughtily. "She is the protégé and apprentice to *your ruler*, country foal, a wielder of magic's you could never possibly understand. She demands to be courted by someone of sophistication and high class, someone who can truly accept her for all that she is."

"That's a lot of high faluting cobbswabble comin' from a travelin' magician who got ran out of town on a bad bluff. Yer all limb and no fruit, and I'll brand my own flank before I let Twilight be carried off by someone the likes of you."

"Why wait?" Trixie grinned nastily, summoning a small fireball in her hoof. "I know a spell that will do just that!"

Twilight stepped forward. "...You two, please..." She pleaded with them with eyes that seemed fit to tear up from all the stress and uncertainty. She knew she had made a mistake somewhere along the lines to lead up to this. The two looked to her, then to each other, Trixie extinguishing the magical fire.

"Let's set this straight." Macintosh said.

"Yes, lets."

"We both fancy Miss Twilight."

"Too true."

"And neither one o' us is gonna back down."

"Not in your life."

"So let's settle this with some matter o' civility."

"What do you propose?"

"Miss Trixie. You and me. I challenge you to a contest."

Twilight swallowed, feeling a panic sweat start. She had witnessed her fair share of contests in Ponyville to know how those went. "I...W-what kind of contest? Nothing dangerous! I won't let you two get hurt fighting over me!"

"Nothin' of the sort." Big Mac reassured. "No, I challenge you, Miss Trixie, to the oldest show of skill and strength in Equestria."

"So it is to be a race then?" Trixie asked, satisfied with the suggestion. Macintosh nodded. "So be it. However, this is Twilights decision." They both turned to face Twilight. "Do you accept our compromise?"

Twilight looked to them each in the eyes. They both looked so determined to see this through. Big Macintosh, with his kind heart, and determination, willing to lay his honor on the line for her. And then there was Trixie. Complex and infuriating Trixie. She could not explain her feelings for other

Unicorn, other than it was through her that she had tasted blood, and would be lying if she didn't want more.

"Alright...I will consent to this..." Twilight nodded, looking around the room at all the eyes now on her. "A fair race. As this is me on the line as the prize, I will be the one to set the rules and choose the track. We will meet again here in one week. Are we in agreement?"

"Agreed." Macintosh and Trixie said together.

"Good...Now...I feel like I should lay down." Twilight tried to laugh a little as she trotted over to her couch and flopped over onto it, her back to the group.

...

Trixie placed her hat back on her head as she prepared to depart. She had arrangements of her own to make, for her grand victory over Macintosh, "Until we meet again, Mr. Macintosh. I look forward to your crushing defeat."

"Mind your words, Miss Trixie. Remember the last time your tongue did more workin' than your head." The two shook hooves, and Trixie took her leave. Macintosh let out a breath watching her vanish down the road. Something about that filly struck him cold. She'd try and pull some trickery during the race, no doubt about it. He would have to be prepared for anything. Shaking his mane, he turned and ventured back inside where everyone was sitting around in an awkward silence. Applejack looked fairly agitated by the whole affair. Fluttershy was sitting beside Twilight, whom was still laying with her back to everyone while the yellow Pegasus petted her mane. Rainbow Dash was leaning against a far bookcase, trying to look cool and collected, but the way she kept swinging her hooves hinted irritation. Rarity meanwhile returned with some fresh made tea.

"Well, now everyone, let's stop acting like someone just died." Rarity said with a lilted tone as she poured out some cups.

"I just don't get it!" Rainbow Dash grumbled. "Macintosh is ten times the pony Trixie is."

"Well...He is much bigger than she is...And I'm sure he's much faster at a gallop..." Fluttershy said. "Statistically, there's no doubt that Macintosh is the better pony. For the race, I mean."

"I don't mean that, I mean...Twilight, why her of all ponies?" Rainbow Dash motioned to the purple Unicorn."

"...I-it's complicated..." Twilight uttered, curling up more so on the couch. Some of what Trixie had said before rang true. There was some deep desire in her for someone who she could talk about magic with, and not get blank or bored stares. Someone she could do research together with. Be of like minds with. But...in contrast, would a life with Macintosh be that bad? Sure they probably didn't have the same passions in life, but that didn't mean they couldn't live happily together...

Applejack was about to say something, and it probably was not going to be the kindest. She was the bearer of the element of Honesty, not sugar-coating, after all, but Mac put a hoof on her shoulder and shook his head. "...Let's get back to the farm, sis. Still got some things to take care of..."

"Right..." Applejack sighed. "...Bye everyone."

There was an echo of goodbyes all around.

...

"Yer actually okay with this...?" Applejack asked as the two trotted down the road, her head heavy and scowling. "That foalish Twilight...Oh, I could just kick somethin' right now..."

"Don't blame Twilight." Macintosh said, his usual calm returning now that Trixie was out of his hair. "It don't change how I feel. I'll prove to her what I'm worth, even if it's just who's faster 'round a track."

Applejack looked up at her brother, displaying that honorable determination she loved so much about him. "Is...Twilight really worth the trouble to prove yourself to?"

"She's yer friend, AJ. You tell me." He asked.

Applejack thought for a bit. She was still mighty angry at her. But...This seemed like the sort of mess of road apples she'd get herself into. She wanted to know what love was and now she was getting a taste of it.

"Yeah...Yeah, I reckon she is..."

...

"Why'd AJ look so angry?" Pinkie Pie announced her reappearance, minus the broom, however her face was covered in lipstick prints, everyone noted. "What? Oh, gosh, did Brian leave a hickey?" Pinkie Pie panicked some, rubbing at her face. It was enough to get some laughs from the group, the mood lightening.

"Look...Twilight..." Rainbow Dash said, peering over the couch at the Unicorn. "...I want you to know I'm there for ya. Applejacks just got her feathers ruffled about Macintosh."

"Of course, dear, we all are." Rarity said simply, as though it wasn't even a point. "We are your friends, and we will respect your decisions...even if we don't particularly agree with them. However that does not mean that we will stand by idly if on the off chance you do something stupid."

Twilight rolled over to face the group, smiling softly. "Thanks guys. I guess I'm just a little confused right now...I never thought Trixie would come back to call on what we talked about..."

"Maybe..." Fluttershy mused delicately. "That's why Love isn't an Element of Harmony?"

Everyone glanced to the Pegasus, who blushed self-consciously at the round of attention. "I mean...All the elements are harmony are things that bring people together, right? But...Love can bring people together, but it can also tear people apart..."

"That was...very profound, Fluttershy." Rarity hummed. "But yes...I suppose love is a building stone, and the raucous kick that topples it all as well."

Twilight turned this over in her head, unconsciously writing a letter to the Princess in her head. A silence once more fell, which caused Pinkie Pie to noticeably fidget as she looked around.

"H-Hey! You know what would make us feel a whole super lot better?"
Pinkie Pie bounced.

"Lemme guess...A party?" Rainbow Dash smirked at the earth pony.
"That's your answer to everything."

"Of course it is! It's the answer to all things! Chip a hoof, throw a party! Bad day at the bakery, throw a party! Catch your boyfriend in the closet with your best mop, throw a PAR-TAY!" Pinkie Pie cheered.

Smiles grew all around, along with some light giggling.

"I would like that, Pinkie...Thank you..." Twilight said, sitting up, putting her hooves over Fluttershy's and Rarity's shoulders, pulling them close, while Rainbow Dash rested her head on top of Twilights over the back of the couch. "Thank you guys, for being there for me."

"Ah, don't get all mushy on us, Twilight." Rainbow Dash ruffled her mane.

"That's right." Twilights confidence began to return to her voice. "After all, I have a race to organize!"

Chapter 7

Macintosh rounded the bend on the dirt road cutting through Sweet Apple Acres, straining his muscles for just a little bit more speed as he approached the line drawn in the dirt marking the end of his lap. His legs were screaming, threatening to give out, but the adrenaline was keeping them in motion. It was only when he crossed the line that he trotted down to a canter, collapsing under the shade of an apple tree.

"Eight minutes. Thirty second less than last." Applejack held out the stopwatch for Macintosh to see for himself, smiling down at her big brother. For the last two days between working and other things, he had taken to running the entirety of Sweet Apple Acres, training for the race that would decide whether he and Twilight Sparkle would be seeing more of each other.

"Heh....I can do better..." Macintosh dunked his head into a bucket of water laid out for him, tossing his head back and swishing his wet mane about.

"Easy there, big guy. Any faster and I reckon we'll have another Pony capable of breaking the sound barrier." Applejack had been more than obliging to help him in his training, keeping note of his progress, even if she did worry a little about him pushing himself too far. She was keen to remind him of her own stubborn upsets with trying to go one mile more than one had the legs for.

She knew Twilight was on his mind since they left her place that day with Trixie's challenge in place. Macintosh had a look about him when his mind was occupied. Looking out ahead at nothing, but looking with purpose. Face set and serious

He didn't trust Trixie to run this race fair, but he had every intention of doing so.

"I can do better, AJ..." Macintosh got back up and gave his legs a stretch, "I gotta be better."

Applejack smiled reassuringly to her big brother, giving a soft shrug. "You done ran the perimeter of the whole property in eight minutes, Mac."

"But now I need endurance. I faltered twice back there on the trail and almost ate dirt. And I think I know how train for it." Macintosh got that determined look once more. "Go get the Crusaders."

...

"Ma'am, I would like to express once more..." A timid male voice murmured as Trixie enjoyed a cup of tea, her horn aglow with magic as she finished levitating and arranging the curved, brightly colored wood ramps, structures, and metal hoops into an adequate test track for her purposes, "That these grounds are officially off limits until the Wonderbolts training facility is completed...so...um...I'm going to ask that you please let me out of this box, so that I may, um...escort you off the premises so that no one is injured on-site? Please?"

Trixie mused for a moment, regarding the big blue crate she was nestled on top of on the far end of the field.

"I'll let you out when I'm finished. Now be quiet and let me concentrate." She knocked on the wood of the crate and hopped down, tossing the empty tea cup aside as she approached her makeshift starting line. Trixie was confident that whatever trail Twilight set before her and her rival, it was most certainly not going to be a straight shot race to the finish on a country trail. That would give too much of an advantage to her larger, sturdier opponent. Trixie was by no means a slouch when it came to physical fitness, she could keep up with the best of them at a good gallop. But this was Big Macintosh she was talking about. Big, brawny, Macintosh. The stallion could probably pull a full load cart and not lose momentum and speed even with a wobbly wheel.

No, she knew how Twilight's mind worked. She would play fair, give both the adequate chance to excel.

So, what better way to practice than with an obstacle course? She would train her reflexes, go for speed and agility. Be prepared physically and mentally for whatever came at her on the day of battle.

She bent down and took in a breath, steeling herself...And with a snap of her hoofs on the ground she burst forward. Her track began with a ramp and a leap across a chasm to another ramp. Easy enough, all it required was enough speed and a timely leap...

...

A lone pony walked along the dirt road out from town, a bag bearing the label of Sugarcube Corner Bakery gripped between her lips. She was dressed in a fine dark purple cape and hood, a long unicorn's horn protruding forward, only the briefest glimpse of a lock of blue mane to be seen. She hummed softly to herself as her path brought her alongside the area being developed for some sort of spectacle. Weeks ago, it had been a vibrant field until an infestation of parasprites rendered it unfit.

The pony paused as she took notice of a long line of protrusions and structures. Too organized and purposeful to simply be bits of construction refuse and material ushered aside, not to mention, there was a curious blue Unicorn, also in a cape, racing up a ramp, leaping to clear a gap, failing miserably, seeming to growl a long string of curses before trying again...And receiving a very similar fate.

It reminded her of something she read...about the true definition of madness being doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.

It demanded investigation.

...

Trixie paused to catch her breath, and to let the ringing in her head stop after that last jump came up short and she crashed headfirst into the sheer side of the other ramp. She pondered moving the ramps a little closer, but that would mean reorganizing the spinning poles and fire traps. She was about to give it another go when she became aware of another Pony watching her from the fence...From afar, she looked like Twilight, which gave Trixie a small boost of confidence...Twilight was checking on her progress! She decided to greet her, her confidence slightly dwindling when she discovered it not to be Twilight, but another Unicorn altogether attempting to pull off the "traveling witch" look. Still...she had an audience. And Trixie did love an audience.

"Ah...Come to see the precursor to a marvelous spectacle?" Trixie asked as she trotted up to the fence line. "No doubt, all of Ponyville has heard of the grand race that will be happening soon."

"I'm afraid I have heard nothing of the sort." Her voice was soft as she sat her bag of goods down, but had a humor in it. "What is it you're doing? It looks rather painful."

This deflated Trixie some. Didn't Twilight know the first thing about holding a contest like a race? You spread the word so the whole town can come and see. If she wanted to keep it quiet she would have suggested a game of cards rather than making her go to all this effort for a private affair.

"Well...Ahem..." Trixie cleared her throat, dusting herself off some as to look presentable, "As you no doubt know, I am the Great and Powerful Trixie..."

"Never heard of you." The Pony stated rather flatly. "...Is that crate bouncing around?"

Trixie moved to block the view of her captive, laughing nervously before trying to turn on the showpony charm once more. "The Great and Powerful Trixie...? Scholar, magician extraordinaire?"

"Ah...I see...So what are you doing then? It doesn't look like magic." The pony observed.

"Ah, yes, well I am currently involved in a civil dispute over the affections of another pony...One Twilight Sparkle, you know the name?"

"Yes...As a matter fact I do..."

"Good. So then, the race shall determine the suitor that shall be accepted by Lady Sparkle as her lover, and the other must accept defeat and ridicule."

The pony tilted her head, gazing out from her hood with an azure eye that seemed to sparkle underneath. "...And you think you will win...?"

"Of course. The Great and Powerful Trixie overcomes all obstacles that come across her path."

"You keep crashing." The pony said, noting her observations. "You can't even hop one obstacle."

Trixie puffed up her chest and turned up her nose. "...I may be hitting a few snags and rough edges, but I'm certain I will get the hang of it..."

"You're a magician...use your magic to clear the gap." The pony stated, as though it should have been the first thing Trixie thought of, whilst turning to stick her muzzle into the bag of baked good..

"Hmmm...Not a bad idea...but how to keep it unnoticed...?" Trixie put a hoof to her chin and turned away in thought. When she looked back, she saw her visitor's flank retreating down the road. On a fence post, she had left a muffin. Trixie sniffed at it, smelling fresh baked oatbread with a hint of blueberry, shrugged and devoured it. A light bulb then clicked inside her head, and a fantastically genius grin cut across her face.

"My good sir..." She trotted to the crate. "I shall have to leave momentarily, so I will have to let you out, but only if you promise not to disturb my training course."

"Um...er...What will be the penalty is it's touched?" A voice asked from within.

"Do you know what happens when a horse is struck by lightening?" Trixie asked in a cheerful tone,

"...No..." The voice whimpered. "What happens?"

"Care to find out...?" Trixie asked, just as sweet.

"....No...."

"Good pony." Trixie's horn glowed and the crate walls fell, revealing a green-furred horse with a hammer cutie-mark, who was cowering under a mound of hay. "Oh...and are there any spare horse shoes hereabouts? Size 3?"

...

Through the market square of Ponyville, another spectacle was taking place. A cart, loaded to almost crippling capacity with rocks, to the point where the wheels were barely making an effort to turn, was coming across the road. In the cart, three young foals in red capes coaxed a local workhorse to keep up the pace, one of them brandishing a crop, but was too small and too far away to do anything with it. The big red stallion groaned and struggled against his yolk, his face a brighter shade of red than the rest of him, snorting and grunting along, digging hooves into the earth to drag along the way.

"C'mon, Big Brother!" Applebloom cheered and hopped in the seat in the cart, rattling the huge bushel of rocks the Cutie Mark Crusaders had collected for their newest project- the private trainers of Big Macintosh for the upcoming Race For The Kissy Face, as it was officially coined as by Pinkie Pie, who was following behind the cart, passing out flyers, featuring an artists rendition of Trixie and Macintosh glaring each other down while in the background, a rendition of local librarian Twilight Sparkle, dressed in pull Princess in Danger regalia, held a hoof to her head in woe from the balcony of a particularly menacing tower.

Come one come all, the big and the small, for the race to end all races! There can be only one! This Friday, at Long-Grass Fields! Present this flyer at Sugarcube Corner and get a free Peach Tart! While supplies last! Be there, for the Race For The Kissy Face!

"Soooo...why are we making your brother pull the rocks again?" Scootaloo inquired. "These are supposed to be for our castle. How are we supposed to earn our Siege cutie marks if we're helping him train?"

"yeah, how is this supposed to help Mac with the race?" Sweetie-Belle asked.

"Well, obviously, my brother is the fastest horse in Ponyville, right?" Applebloom stated.

"Well...I guess." Scootaloo raised a brow.

"So if he's really fast on his hooves, then he'll be extra fast if he can be fast haulin' our rocks! He's buildin' endurance and stamina! He'll need it for when he marries Twilight and she becomes my sister!"

"Why's that, Applebloom?" Sweetie-Belle asked.

"Well, I always heard Applejack talkin' how Big Mac was fit to bust a filly when-"

"Applebloom!" Macintosh called over his shoulder, giving her a stern glare.

"Just sayin'!"

...

Twilight, for the last two days, had holed herself up in her library, emerging only once to request a copy of the Ponyville annex from the town hall. In that time, she had constructed from spare materials a small model of Long-Grass Fields, a location chosen for the race due to its long winding roads, straightaway's, and a bridge that crossed over a river that would serve nicely as the starting point.

Trixie's hunch had been correct. Twilight wanted this to be a fair display. Macintosh obviously could beat Trixie in a straight race hands down. Unless, as Spike had put it, a Ursa Minor was in hot pursuit.

Twilight stared at the diagram in front of her, scribbling notes here and there about weather pattern manipulation, and runic booby traps. Were portals a little much? There used to be an old saying at the academy that there was never a bad time for portals.

Maybe the Doctor would let them do a tour around the Tardis...at least one of the smaller side corridors...

She paused and looked out the window, lost in stray thoughts. Her stomach suddenly pitched now that she wasn't focused on her organizing and designing. She tucked her hooves under her, ears drooping as she thought about the moment the race ended...She would be someone's lover...She wasn't sure she was ready for that, but it was happening.

"Don't worry yourself sick, Twilight..." She sighed, shaking her mane. "This is still part of the project...it's just...moving forward a lot faster than we thought. We have to be...objective about this...right?" Her question received no answer. She wasn't so sure anymore. Or about anything.

Maybe she wasn't worthy of either of them...

Twilight turned away from her work and climbed the ladder to her bed, disappearing under the quilt.

...

Trixie's camp sat on the northern most edge of Ponyville. A cauldron boiled over the campfire while Trixie rummaged through her suitcase, pulling out bottles and vials, occasionally referencing an open page in a large tome. "Lets see...a pinch of this...a pinch of that..." She yanked the cork off a vial of green cubes and added three, then another for good measure, turning the boiling contents a bright neon shade.

Satisfied with her mixture, she fished out a small box of horseshoes, dumping them into the cauldron.

"Excellent. Now, let it simmer and cook into the metal. And by morning, they will be ready!" She stared into the rolling concoction, grinning from ear to ear, clapping her hooves together, oh so pleased. Twilight will soon be hers, and together, they will make sweet sweet magic together.

Her stomach rumbled, breaking her reveling in her genius.

"Mmm...Muffins..." She slinked into her tent to partake of the muffins she had bought after that strange Unicorn had left one for her.

...

Elsewhere, in the palace of the dawn and the dusk, hooves clicked on smooth marble as the 'unicorn' in the purple hood entered into the private sanctuary of Princess Celestia herself, setting the bag of baked good down so as to pull the garment from her person, revealing the alicorn beneath.

"Sister...I think you may want to have a talk with your pupil." Princess Luna said as she handed off the cloak to a servant. From where she lay across the room on a large, plush circular cushion, Princess Celestia sat up, tilting her head curiously.

"Oh? And why is that?" Her horn began to glow as she pulled the bag towards her, peering inside, and squealing with delight while pulling out a box of specially made cupcakes. "Yay!"

"She has two suitors set to compete for her affection. A race." Luna recounted her meeting with Trixie. "I am assuming this is not at all associated with her appointed task."

The Princess of the Moon settled beside her sister and nibbled on a blueberry muffin, while she waited for Celestia to reply with her thoughts, instead receiving the indulgent 'yummy' noises. Celestia caught her gaze and returned that quizzical look.

"...Twamight..." Celestia paused to swallow, a dollop of orange frosting on her nose. "Excuse me...Twilight is engaged in extracurricular activity at the moment, my dear sister. I was almost afraid she would not reach this point. I'm happy she is able to have this experience."

"Someone will be hurt." Luna said flatly, obviously disapproving.

"I know..." Celestia had that spark of worry in her ancient eyes, still not making any move to clean her snout. "It will be a painful lesson..."

"Will you not interfere?" Luna asked, looking up at her ever wise, ever contemplating sibling. "Will you not speak to her at least?"

"I will do what I can...But I cannot interfere directly...As I said, this will be, perhaps, one of the most painful lessons she will ever learn...The lesson of heartbreak..."

"but why, sister?"

"...As the world may never know good, unless there is evil in it...So too, can one not truly know love, until she has learned of loss..."

"Sister...?"

"Yes, Luna...?"

"Please clean your snout. I can't take you seriously when you have frosting on your face."

Chapter 8

...

It was Crunch Time for the team of pegassi and earth ponies busting their flanks to get Long-Grass Fields prepared for the race in just a little more than two days. Work was only just now beginning on the Mine Field now that the specially designed Magic Mines had arrived from Twilight Sparkles house just that morning. The ponies involved were more than a little nervous handling the oddly glowing discs covered in runes.

"Careful...careful..." One pony said to another as they very carefully began covered a mine with dirt. Too little, it would be obvious on the course. Too much, and the weight would set it off...

"Hey! Are you guys done on that corner yet?" Rainbow Dash hollered from where she was monitoring goings on. The sudden shout caused the pony with the dirt to slip, hoof landing directly on the mine. There was a loud 'poof' sound and a blast of purple smoke. When it cleared, two chickens sat there in place of the two ponies, whom looked up at Rainbow Dash with angry glares, as did the rest of the minefield team.

"Eh...heh heh...My bad?" Rainbow Dash hunched her shoulders, giving a feeble and apologetic smile before excusing herself.

...

"So my idea is then to take the ol' girl up on that cliff to go along those roads there. You know, let the weather team work their magic on them up there. Then I'll pick them up...here, and then bring them back to the trail." The Doctor pointed a hoof to some points on the map spread out between him and Twilight as they sat about at the base camp of the operation. Twilight nodded and took some notes.

"Good, that covers my portal idea...Now all we need to do is wait for Pinky Pie to finish the-"

There was a distant boom, both ponies looking towards what appeared to be a pink missile clearing the tree's.

"...The Pony-Cannonball course..." Twilight sighed and took down a few more notes.

"Ah, Miss Sparkle, I hope you don't mind my saying...isn't this course..." The Doctor clicked his teeth, trying to find the right term. "Eh, needlessly complicated? I mean, I know this is your virtue on the line here, but..."

"It is a bit much, isn't it...?" The spark of organized thinking in Twilights eyes faded almost immediately. "...I've just been keeping myself so pre-occupied with designing this race to keep my mind off other things, that I guess I just got carried away. "

"Ah, don't be so hard on yourself, Miss Sparkle." The Doctor looked over the grounds. "Magnus Curriculum. The Great Race. Sport of sports in Equestria, you know. A match of honor and skill amongst equines. Used to be used as non-violent means of settling civil disputes...Political unrests...even the settling of suitors vying for a maidens hand. "

"But am I right to do this?" Twilight asked.

"You didn't choose it, they did. Remember?" The Doctor tucked his front hooves underneath him, looking more towards the sky. "You're letting them decide this for themselves. Over who's worthy, or at least who's the faster runner. A lot of uses, a good set of feet."

Twilight hung her head some. "I'm not worth all this attention...Half of Ponyville will be there..."

"Well, obviously you're worth some attention, you know, if people are willing to give it to you."

"Doctor?"

"Hm?"

"Are you...jealous that you aren't in the race?"

"Welllll..." The Doctor chuckled dryly. "...It's for the best, Miss Sparkle. I'm rubbish when it comes to relationships. Even my own. Besides. There's a certain someone in my life who would be very cross if me and you had gone any farther."

Twilight tilted her head curiously. "Who would that be?"

Before the Doctor could answer, they were interrupted by a sudden arrival of Rarity, looking very excited to the point where she was almost hopping in place, a behavior usually associated with Pinkie Pie.

"Twilight! You must come with me! This instant! Now! Right now!" Rarity exclaimed in a tone that matched her excitement. Twilight was no stranger to it, it was the look Rarity got when she found a particularly large gem, or someone had written a good review of a dress she had made.

"Why? What's wrong, Rarity?" Twilight asked. "We still have some work to finish her, if-"

Rarity was already gripping a hold on Twilights tail with her teeth, uttering that it absolutely had to be now.

Twilight sighed after being dragged a few feet. "Fine, fine, I'll come with...I can walk myself, you know!"

...

Twilight stared at her cross expression in the floor-length mirror in Rarity's boutique, dressed in a rather ornate, frilly purple and blue gown decorated in star patterns. The seamstress herself was busy taking some measurements around her flank.

"...You're making me a dress."

"Mm hmm." Rarity murmured affirmatively, whilst holding some pins between her teeth.

"Why are you making me a dress?"

"Because I asked her to." A new but familiar voice answered.

Twilight turned and sputtered as Princess Celestia stood in the doorway to Rarity's den, tall and slender, the afternoon light coming through Rarity's window causing sparkles to cascade through her fluorescent rainbow mane.

"P-Princess Celsti-OW!" Twilight jumped, shooting a glare at Rarity.

"Sorry..." Rarity apologized, sticking the offending needle for the time being back into her pin cushion, trotting off to measure and cut more fabric, but not before bowing to the princess. "If you will excuse me, your majesty..."

...

Once they were alone, Celestia smiled and gave Twilight a warm and friendly nuzzle. "My ever faithful student..."

"Princess...But why?" Twilight asked., blushing some at the sudden show of affection from her superior. As she always did when Celestia was affectionate.

"I wanted you to look splendid on your special day, my student." Celestia said.

"No, no, I mean...Why are you here?" Twilight asked, shaking her mane. Not that she was unappreciative. It was just unexpected. And no matter how relaxed the Princess was, Twilight walked on eggshells so as to never disappoint her mentor.

"I felt perhaps it was time we talked." Celestia said, sitting down so as to be at least eye level with Twilight. "So...Tell me about them."

Twilight swallowed, feeling her throat go a bit dry. Would Celestia approve? Certainly she had approved of her friends, even Pinkie Pie. However this was her future beau she was about to describe.

"Well..." Twilight sat beside the Princess in her half finished dress, thinking on how best to describe Big Mac and Trixie. "...Big Macintosh works at the local apple farm. He works hard all year, and takes very good care of his family."

"And what is it you like about him?" Celestia asked, her eyes aglow with an almost childish curiosity.

"You wouldn't think to look at him, but he's very deep. He's big but he's also really gentle...He's a perfect gentle pony to boot..."

"Is he cute?" Celestia asked with a soft giggle, a question that made Twilight blush a little harder.

"...Well...He isn't hard on the eyes. He was...also my first kiss"

"And the other?"

"Ah, that's Trixie...She's that magician from the Ursa Minor incident..."

"I remember her..." Celestia nodded.

"Well...I...She was the first real magic user I had met in Ponyville. A sorceress, just like me. I felt bad that we ended on such a sour note, but when I tried to make amends, she pushed me away...Until a few days ago...She wanted to be with me, just as I was starting to see Macintosh..."

"Do you like her, Twilight?" Celestia asked.

"I..." She remembered how Trixie had looked at the café in Canterlot. That sheepish shy expression when Twilight talked about how she had felt a connection between them, even if it had only been to settle matters. She recalled how hurt she looked when she accused Twilight of setting her up for a prank.

'Are you trying to make a fool of me?' She had asked.

"...I want to make things better for her...I've seen the real Trixie under all that boasting and outlandish talk..." Twilight looked up at Celestia, trying to convey what she meant, what she was feeling when she thought of Trixie. The warmth of her lips, the cuteness when she was bashful. "There's more to her than everyone sees..."

Celestia nodded. "I understand. I hope that whoever wins, that you both make each other very happy..." The princess lowered her head and leaned against Twilight. Twilight in turn leaned against her.

"...Princess...Have you ever been in love?" Twilight asked.

"Once." Celestia answered, smiling happily in fond remembrance. "...He was like fire...burning through time. I was but a filly when we met...But he was always there. Always watching."

"Who was he?" Twilight tilted her head, having never seen such a look of nostalgia on Celestia's face before, not since Princess Luna had been freed from Nightmare Moon.

"Oh..." A soft chuckle emanated from Celestia's lips. "I don't know. I never thought to ask him for his name...But to be honest, I don't think he would have told me the truth anyway...But that's okay."

Twilight smiled up at her. "You really must have loved him."

"I still do."

"Ahem..." Rarity meekly cleared her throat, returning with her cloth. "Your Excellency, I hate to interrupt, but may I...?"

"Fine..." Twilight got back up and backed her half-finished flank up to Rarity, huffing lightly. Celestia just smiled gently.

...

Trixie hummed to herself as she strolled the mountainside that normally would have taken her back home to Canterlot. Her spirits were high, as they had been for the last few days. Her confidence in her victory had only swollen. She not only cleared that gap, she dominated it. She dominated that whole makeshift course until the security ponies ran her off the field.

She met a few passersby on her little stroll, and all had to pause and watch in awe as she passed by, her head lifted high. Well, as high as one's head gets when their walking the vertical mountainside just above the actual road, her horseshoes glowing a green hue as they met with the rock.

Certainly, there were some ponies in Equestria that would have frowned on the use of enchanted horseshoes to gain an upper hand in a race. Trixie, however, saw it as making use of one's talents over sheer strength and endurance. If you can't beat them, outwit them. That was her motto, right next to "if you can't dazzle them with skill, baffle them with horseradish."

It was starting to get late, and she figured it was about time she headed back for Ponyville. She trotted down the side of the mountain and onto the road proper. She scratched at the ground some and bent down as though preparing for a sprint...And was off like a flash. Well, not literally like a

flash. But noticeably faster than your average pony at full gallop. Her legs barely felt any strain at all. She felt like she could race all the way across Equestria if she wanted to.

Eventually, she reached her camp on the outskirts of Ponyville, maybe a short fifteen minute jog from where she began up the trail towards Canterlot, in which had been maybe a two hour stroll to begin.

"Your shoes are smoking." A voice called to her. Trixie turned and saw the face of that blue unicorn from a few days ago standing right beside her. She almost let out a squeal of shock, before her showpony pride kicked in.

"Ah, it's you again." Trixie then noticed she smelt burning hoof...She looked down and indeed her feet were smoking. She yelped and rolled onto her back, kicking her feet, frantically reaching out with her magic to pull the horseshoes off.

...

The unicorn in the cloak poured more cool water into the bucket as Trixie sat there, looking very annoyed, soaking her hooves, the enchanted horseshoes resting on a stool nearby, their green glow tarnished by scorch marks.

"It's still an ingenious enchantment..." The stranger tried to sound consoling. "If not a bit obvious..."

"The great and powerful Trixie simply pushed it a little too far...She will not make the same mistake during the race." Trixie maintained her pride.

"I would certainly hope not...Someone who makes the same mistake twice hardly can qualify as great and powerful." The unicorn took a seat across from Trixie, using her own magic to stoke the campfire. Trixie narrowed her eyes at her. The great and powerful Trixie did not need to be lectured so.

"So then...To what does the great and powerful Trixie owe this sudden visit...?" Trixie asked coolly. She wasn't exactly in the mood for company, and she was certain this unicorn had a reason for just appearing out of thin air.

"What is it about Twilight Sparkle that fascinates you?" The stranger asked, peering out at Trixie from under her hood. "Why do you pursue her after she supposedly shamed you?"

Trixie blinked at the sudden inquiry as to her pursuit of Twilight Sparkle. She was starting to wonder just what this unicorn's game was.

"Not that it is any of your business... But, why should the great and powerful Trixie not be fascinated by her?" Trixie said, her eyes flickering with a sense that she was not going to tolerate her motives being questioned. "I love her, that is all there is to it."

"Will those feelings remain if you lose?" The stranger asked.

"Ah, but you fail to see, the great and powerful Trixie **WON'T** lose. Not to some common grade workhorse." Trixie smirked, but it soon turned suspicious. "Why? What do you know?"

The stranger shook her head, "The same as you. Uncertainty. I know what that feels like, Trixie. To be alone. To want to cling to anything that might give you solace. "

Trixie drew back some, giving her a curious stare. "...What in Celestia are you talking about?"

The stranger sighed, and looked towards the sun. It had been still for a while, but was now beginning to sink in the horizon. Her time was up.

"...Know this, that if you do lose, do not seek vengeance against her. She is protected, and your life will be made miserable beyond compare of the humiliation of your previous defeat." There was a dull dread in the stranger's voice as she got to her feet.

"...Are you threatening me...?" Trixie asked, a hint of venom in her tone.

"I am." The stranger said coolly, and turned to leave.

"Yes yes, be gone. " Now Trixie was just annoyed, waving a hoof in the direction of her uninvited visitor. Who was she to threaten the great and powerful Trixie? And what reason would she have to seek vengeance against Twilight? Even if she did lose, her ire would not be on her. Then

again, she had no intention of losing, so it was a waste of thought to think about it.

Her hooves still a bit tender, Trixie pushed all thought of the matter out of her mind as she turned her attention to more important matters- her stomach.

"Curses, out of muffins...Looks like the great and powerful Trixie is eating out tonight."

...

Down on Sweet Apple Acres, Big Macintosh's training continued well after dusk. The Cutie Mark Crusaders had been diligent in their training regimen. First was the rocks, then was the boulders. Then it was with rocks and boulders on his back. Then they lost a day when Big Mac threw out his back. By then it was just decided that they had endurance down pat.

Big Mac stood ready as Scootaloo fixed a rope around his midsection, fixed to a tree. Once the knot was secure, Big Mac strained against the rope to create tension.

"A'ight, Big Brother!" Applebloom held a clipboard and Sweetie Belle had the stopwatch. "On your mark...get set!"

"Alonsi!" Scootaloo cried out as she bit the rope, setting Big Mac loose. The red stallion was off like a shot down the trail, leaving the three in the dust.

Coughing and swatting away the dirt, Applebloom looked at Scootaloo.

"Alon-what?"

Scootaloo shrugged. "I hear that pony who lives in the blue box say it all the time."

...

The trail was nothing now. Barely three minutes in and he was already halfway through the trail. Macintosh spurred himself harder on, hooves pounding the dirt road. He kept Twilight in his thoughts. Imagining her just

ahead of the trail. He kept telling himself he had to get to her, that he had to push himself harder.

He was so deep into his meditation, he almost didn't see the dark figure in the middle of the road, but a bright blue blast hit him, and he stopped completely.

Macintosh felt his legs lock in place as though frozen, stopped in mid-gallop. Under the light of the full moon, the figure in a dark cloak approached.

"Macintosh."

"...Luna?" Big Mac's voice was labored while still catching his breath. "What in tarnation...?"

The figure drew back her hood, revealing the Alicorn underneath, soon releasing Macintosh from her hold.

"...It's been a while, hasn't it?" There was a soft coyness in her voice as she circled him, playfully flicking her tail against his flank. "You don't dream of me anymore."

"Luna, I-"

She put a hoof to his lips. "...I know. I've known for a while."

Big Mac lowered his head, closing his eyes. "...I'm sorry..."

"I understand...We come from two different worlds..." Luna smiled gently. "You always asked yourself that right before you went to bed...'would it work?'"

A smile cracked across Big Mac's face a little, eliciting a soft chuckle. "...It was only a matter'a time."

"We had fun though...Always sneaking around under the cover of night. It was romantic..." Luna said, remembering the many nights of taking off after raising the moon to meet with Macintosh in the back of the property. "She's a good choice though...Twilight..."

"Luna..."

"She's here for you, day or night. Unrestrained by status. She can be everything I can only be in your dreams otherwise." Luna leaned up against him, enjoying the warmth of his coat.

"I still have to win the race..." Macintosh grumbled, kicking at the dirt some.

"Do you love her, Macintosh?" Luna asked., still nuzzling against his side.

Macintosh was quiet, turning to look up at the moon and the stars. He asked himself that many times since that date and the eventually challenge. Was Twilight worth all this? No answer came to him...just a smile.

Luna looked up to him and smiled as well. "I see...'an lo, shall it be said that true love is begotten, when no words exist in any language to express how one feels'. "

"...'For there exists no phrase more powerful in all Equestria, than the unspoken value of ones confession of love, not through words, but in deed and thought.'...Princess Celestia, from On Treatise of the Equine Soul, right?" Macintosh murmured.

Luna giggled some. "Sister always loved such prose."

Off in the distance, they could hear the calls of worried foals and a mare, and could see the distant light of Applejacks lantern. No doubt coming to find the long delayed stallion.

"I will see you at the race, dear Mac..." Luna gave him another affectionate nuzzle before drawing her hood. "And...Macintosh?"

"Yea?"

"...Should things...not end well, between you and Twilight...I'll still be here for you..."

Macintosh smiled, nodding. "But...would ya hold it against me if'n I hope it doesn't come to that?"

Luna giggled as she stepped into the shadows. "It would be an insult to Celestia's dear student otherwise..."

...

The Day of the Race...

...

All of Ponyville had shown up. Or so it seemed. The last time Twilight Sparkle had seen so many ponies was at the young fliers competition in Cloudsdale. Why were there so many? She supposed it really should not have surprised her. If they were willing to dedicate a day and a trophy to Applejack for staving off a stampede of cattle, then it only made sense that a race to determine her announced lover would attract just as much attention.

Near the race line, a special platform had been erected for the guests of honor, which included Princess Celestia and her entourage, Princess Luna herself making a rare public appearance. All this attention on her made her feel silly as she stood beside her mentor on the platform, dressed as though she was herself of royal descent.

"Nervous?" Celestia asked softly, noting the almost permanent blush on Twilights face.

"...A little." Twilight said sheepishly. "...I shouldn't, I know."

Celestia gave her a reassuring nuzzle, which made Twilight feel a little bit more at ease. It was almost race time...The knot began to tighten in her stomach again as the contestants arrived at the track. Oddly enough, they had arrived together, not meeting each others gaze. Macintosh had his gaze of determination in play, taught and serious. Trixie had an air of unrivaled confidence as she trotted beside him, her nose turned up in the air.

Both racers stopped and bowed before Twilight and the others.

"Now that the suitors have arrived..." Celestia announced in a clear declaration. "We shall begin the event. The challenge is a single lap race across this track...and to overcome all obstacles set before you. The one

who returns to us, shall earn the favor of my protégé', Twilight Sparkle. There is to be no magic at play during this event. Madam Trixie, do we have an accord?"

"Yes, your Majesty." Trixie bowed with a flourish.

"Then, if the contestants are ready, Twilight Sparkle shall fire the starting shot."

Twilight was handed a starting pistol, taking it in hoof nervously. She was almost visibly shaking. All week had been building up to this, and all her anxieties were about to be played out.

With the crack of the pistol...The race began...

Chapter 9

The race had begun.

Both contestants shot forward, leaving the starting line in the dust. Almost immediately, Big Macintosh had a lead on Trixie, however that was only because Trixie was waiting to at least have some distance from the prying eyes of Princess Celestia and Twilight Sparkle before she activated her horseshoes. For now, she'd let the lead go to the workhorse.

Up above the race track, a hot air balloon soared, trying to keep pace with the two racers.

"Good afternoon, colts and fillies, foals of all ages!" Pinkie Pie's voice echoed across the field with the aid of a megaphone. **"Welcome to the 1st annual Race for the Kissy Face competition!"**

Another voice, that of a young dragon, joined in.

"Are we really calling it that?" Spike asked, more than a little unsettled having to use that title.

"Of course, silly billy willy! Today's the day we get to see who resident librarian and fair maiden Twilight Sparkle gets to make kissy faces with for now on until eternity!"

...

Down on the ground, Twilight Sparkle put a hoof to her face and hunkered down, hoping nopony could see her.

...

"Right. Well, we're already well underway, and it looks like Biiiig Macintosh of Sweet Apple Acres has gotten an early lead on the Great and Powerful Trixie!" Spike observed from above. **"And it looks like they're finishing the first straightaway, and coming up on the mine field!"**

"Don't worry ponies! We've been assured by Twilight herself that the mines are NOT lethal!" Pinkie Pie said, the excitement in her voice nearly masking out the reassuring tone she was trying for.

...

"Mines?" Trixie nearly scuttled herself to a halt, as the big red stallion galloped straight until the stretch of road covered in little mounds. It was only a second before there was a loud pop, and a cloud of purple smoke lifting into the air.

As the smoke cleared, where Macintosh had been standing a mere moment ago, a bright red toad sat there, looking confused.

...

"And Big Macintosh is first to go down! He better HOP TO IT if he wants to get out of this jam!" Pinkie Pie called out.

"Oh no, please not the jokes..." Spike urged.

...

Trixie stared at it for a moment, before a snort escaped, letting loose a rolling laugh. "Oh...Oh my...That...that is really too much...!" She wiped a tear from her eye as she, ever so elegantly began to tip-hoof through the field, minding the mounds. As she stepped by Macintosh, she cast him a smug smile.

"See you at the finish line, MacinTRASH!" She stuck her tongue out and trotted on...before she felt something warm and sticky suddenly snap hold of the back of one of her hind legs.

...

"Wowie! And now Trixie! I can't see! What did she turn into?" Pinkie Pie wedged her way to get control of the telescope.

"Stop crowding, Pinkie!"

...

Trixie coughed and swatted the smoke away, wobbling back onto her feet, feeling a might lightheaded. The first thing she noticed was that she was now relatively the same height as Macintosh...or Macintoad, in this case. The next thing she notices was her obviously large, furry feet...standing on only twop of them, and two fluffy things that kept getting in her vision.

Macintoad grinned a froggy grin at the Trixie Bunny and began hopping onward, bouncing over the mounds. Trixie Bunny growled and hopped after. After a few hops, a dilemma occurred to Trixie Bunny...in their smaller state, the length of the mine field was nearly triple that of their equine size would have accounted for. She would be dead out of breath before the end, let alone enough to finish, while that confounded red toad seemed just busting with energy.

Then a thought occurred to her...And she leapt onto another mine, a bright orange plume of smoke hitting her.

Meanwhile, Macintoad was confident in his stride, bounding effortlessly across the field...Until a bright blue deer leapt right over him, tiny little feet skirting between the mounds. Macintoad saw Trixie's game and immediately hugged a mine.

Trixie was about to look back and gloat, but when she did, she saw her opponent nowhere to be seen. Panicking, she became aware of something landing on her flank. A quick glance revealed a red spider.

Trixie screamed and lost her footing, topping off kilter, the spider crawling along her sides to keep balance...

And suddenly they were on the outskirts of the field, crossing over the glowy purple line, and a very large and very heavy Big Macintosh collapsed right on top of a very startled Trixie. They lay there dazed for a moment until they realized their snouts were pressed firmly against one another before they both recoiled and wiped their lips off on their forelegs.

"You taste like wood!" Trixie spat.

"You don't taste like no fruit basket yerself!" Macintosh huffed.

Both suddenly froze, looked to each other, and then scrambled for the lead.

...

"Well, folks it looks like they finally cleared the minefield!" Spike announced.

"Phooey! I was hoping one of them would hit the cupcake mine!" Pinky Pie pouted.

"...You wanted one of them to turn into a cupcake?" Spike asked.

"Yeah! I'm hungry!"

...

Both ponies struggled for the lead, keeping pace neck to neck, with Trixie gradually faltering back. They were far enough away that Trixie decided it was finally time to bust out her secret weapon. She reached out with her magic, and activated the special alloy coating her horseshoes...

Macintosh almost swallowed his tongue as Trixie's flank waved at him up ahead, the Unicorn's legs a flurry of speed. He clenched his teeth and pounded his hooves against the dirt.

Where in tartation did she suddenly get the energy? Macintosh thought. He spurred himself harder, coming up just close enough that Trixie's tail, billowing from her pace, tickled his nose. If he was a less honorable pony, he could have just sank his teeth into it and taken her down a peg or two.

His train of thought was broken by the sudden rumble of thunder overhead and dark clouds started to sweep into position overhead. The rains followed not long after, accompanied by a harsh wind. The trail was soon drenched and puddles of muddy water, some areas completely flooded, began to appear.

That was when Macintosh saw the steam whistling off of Trixie's hooves. Trixie caught him staring, shooting him a disdainful glare.

"Mind your eyes, peasant!" She hissed, her silver mane flowing across her face as she looked back at him.

"Yer cheatin'!" Macinotsh growled, eyes narrowed against the whipping wind and rain.

"Leveling the playing field! All's fair in love and war, Mister Macin-"

The sudden appearance of a big blue door canceled out the thought as the two plunged into the sudden, surprise corridor.

...

"And...Where did they go?" Spike asked. "Did they go into that phone booth?"

"Wow it must be bigger on the inside for both of them!" Pinkie Pie said.

"Oh, hey, it's disappearing!"

"That sound reminds me of my mom and dad when they would go to bed really early at night."

"Pinkie..."

"Ah, phooey! They cut out my canon course!"

"Because you nearly killed yourself!"

...

Up high over the snowcapped mountains, the Tardis reappeared, depositing the two racers onto a snowy peak. They rolled until they reached a summit by a trail, a sudden kick-up of snow pelting them. Trixie spat out a mouthful of snow and wrestled with the obnoxiously colored and awkwardly long scarf she'd gotten tangled up in when they crashed into the strange box. Kicking it off, Trixie tripped and rolled through the snow while Macintosh loomed over her.

"I shoulda known you'd take to playin' dirty!" Macintosh shouted over the howl of the blizzard.

"Save me the lecture, Macintosh!" Trixie reared up to get in his face. "The Great and Powerful Trixie is willing to go to ANY length to get what she rightfully deserves!"

"Twilight ain't no 'what!'" Big Mac snapped. "Now you take those kickers off right this minute before I go and do something I'll regret!"

"Oh my..." Trixie played at coy. "I've just about driven the honorable workhorse to violence...Very well..." She bent down as though to pick off her horseshoes... Suddenly rearing back and kicking a chunk of snow with all the force of a hardened snowball thanks to the enchanted hoofwear. "Here!"

Macintosh saw stars as he wiped the snow from his eyes. Trixie was already ahead of him, the snow melting and turning to ice in her wake.

Cursing, Macintosh plowed onward.

The hillside was starting to get steeper, only the occasional yellow arrow marker to point them onto the right path, the flying snow making it hard to anything but the bright yellow guides. Both horses were starting to wear down from the bite of the cold, but Trixie's sudden push was keeping her going, despite her teeth chattering more than her legs were moving.

Suddenly, two arrows came into view, pointing downward at the very edge of a cliff. Trixie skid to a stop and stared down the sheer cliff, instinctively swallowing. She snapped her gaze to the snowy trail as Macintosh caught up to her, eyes nearly flaming, and just a small hint of red under one nostril.

"Afraid of heights, Mr. Macintosh?" Trixie asked with an air of playfulness.

"Not one bit. You?" Macintosh's voice strained to keep an even temper.

Kicking one leg out over the cliff...the rest of Trixie soon followed. Macintosh peered over the edge just as Trixie vanished within the strange blue box, that was now perpendicular to the cliff wall.

...

"Hey, look, they're back from the mountain! The clouds have cleared, and only one more stretch to go before the end of the race! Trixie is in the lead, with no sign yet of Big Macintosh!"Spike called over the megaphone.

"That track looks like all kinds of muddy chocolaty goodness!" Pinkie Pie squeaked. **"hey, can we go get sundaes after this?"**

...

Trixie grinned to herself as she galloped out of the Tardis. Almost there...Just a little more, and Twilight would be hers. She soon heard the familiar heavy gallops of her opponent behind her.

Oh no you don't! Trixie scowled as she turned up the heat on her shoes once more, sending sprays of water into the air as she sped through puddles.

The finish line was within sight, far up ahead. She could see the crowds, and all the balloons that silly pink one had decorated the area with. Soon it would be all over...

However, she felt the earth underneath her give way to mud and muck as her hoof bit into a well drenched part of the trail. The mud came up to her knee's, matters only becoming worse the more she struggled and kicked, even the speed of her enchantment only digging her deeper. The more she tried to move, the more the mud sucked her in.

"No...Nonononononono!" Trixie squealed. She glanced up to see Big Macintosh as he was trotting up to her from behind, circling around the patch of mud.

"Don't just stand there, idiot! Help me!" Trixie screeched, her silver mane now a more filthy grey color with splotches of mud all over.

Big Mac just continued onward...

"Come back here!" Trixie cried after him as his form got farther away.

...

"Huh...And it looks like...Trixie's gotten herself in a right pickle there, wouldn't you say, Pinkie?"

"Mmmm...Pickles...Pickles with jelly..."

...

And so it was that Big Macintosh won the race. The ponies cheered for the victor, and once more for the happy couple as Twilight Sparkle came to his side, rewarding him with a delicate kiss. Under the gaze of her mentor, Princess Celestia, Twilight, dressed like a storybook princess and stars in her eyes, did pledge that from that day forward, she was his mare. Macintosh, covered in mud, and a bit of a bloody nose still, in turn pledged that from that day forward, he would be her stallion. And the ponies rejoiced.

And then, over a megaphone most loud, came the voice of one most merry, that it was time to party.

...

Trixie didn't bother to finish the race. She felt no need to present herself, the evident loser. She had lost. A bitter truth that stung worse than any heckler hopped up on fermented apple cider ever could. When she returned to her campsite, she half expected to find that mysterious Unicorn there, to perhaps deliver some sort of metaphorical capstone to the whole affair. But no. She returned alone.

She was used to being alone, such that it was. But this time, she actually felt it. Alone, that is. As she began packing, magically transporting the items into the confines of her pointed, star-studded hat, her expression remained the same. Cold indifference.

She was probably never going to be able to return to the little squat of Ponyville, now twice defeated. Her reputation was like the dirt that now caked her from horn to hoof. What hurt more than her ravaged public image torn even more to tatters, was that she had also lost Twilight.

As she kicked dirt on the cold ashes of her campfire, she replayed that day at the café in her head. How happy she had felt afterwards of the aspect of her and Twilight...Two Unicorns taking on the world. What had happened to that?

"Played me like a fool..." Trixie felt the words spill out as she kicked one final time and turned to meet the road. Only a few days later, and she had her hooves all over someone else. And how many others before that? That

filly-fooling, mane-chasing trollop...And on top of that, how indifferent she had been of the whole affair! No hesitation to the challenge of a race at all. How very Twilight of her.

The more Trixie thought about it the angrier she felt. She was well past being depressed. Had what she had felt for Twilight even been real, she wondered.

Or was it like her act...?

Just one big illusion.

...

The celebration of the race went well into the night. For all intents and purposes, Twilight Sparkle just assumed it wasn't so much in celebration of her and Big Macintosh publicly finalizing their relationship, just that it was that Ponies like to party. Any excuse was a good one, even a lovers quarrel.

Twilight sat under a tree on a blanket, watching the other ponies dance under the smiling presence of Celestia and Luna. Well...Celestia at least. Luna looked a bit forlorn. By Twilights side, Macintosh sat nestled beside her, his legs still a bit achy from the endeavor he had just undergone.

She smiled to him and nuzzled against his neck, feeling that warm glow rush through her. Affection. That indescribable sensation of enjoying the presence of another. In return, he bent down to kiss her forehead. They had each other now...

But...deep down...Twilight was unsettled. She was hoping to at least be able to talk to Trixie after the race. To ensure that, despite her loss of her as a lover, she did not want them to part on bad grounds. Just because she had lost didn't mean that Twilight was going to stop thinking about the boisterous unicorn. It hurt a little inside to think that Trixie had stormed off perhaps in tears, a lover scorned.

It was not a feeling that had gone unnoticed.

Big Macintosh had assumed that Trixie would remain lingering on Twilights mind, and he had set himself determined to be there for her. He was hers

now, all of Ponyville knew that, but he didn't need their knowing to come to terms with that. He had been smitten with her for many a season now, since she forced her way onto the property to put his stubborn sister in her place when she nearly killed herself trying to harvest the whole crop by herself. He'd told himself that 'one day, I'm gonna marry that mare'. He never would have thought he'd be that close to that. That said, what hurt Twilight, now hurt him. That was only fair.

Eventually, someone took notice that the couple of honor were off by themselves doing nothing. Rarity trotted over and demanded Twilight take her handsome stud out onto the dance floor and show off her gown. She was soon followed by Pinkie Pie, wearing a scuba-suit and Brian with a Rubber Duck tied to him. Then Applejack tried dragging the blanket towards the square.

Eventually, both in a fit of laughs, they conceded and joined the others.

...

Luna was deep in thought as she sat there beside her sister, who was very much enthralled by the ponies dancing and carrying on. Typical for her. Luna was tired and wanted to go home, after having to excuse herself for raising the moon and bringing the night. But still, she didn't want to appear rude at one of the few times she graced the peasantry with her presence.

"M...Miss Luna...I mean, your majesty?" A soft and fluttery voice called to her from her left. Looking down, she saw Fluttershy, one of the Elements of Harmony, standing there after apparently bringing her something to drink.

After meeting the princesses gaze, Fluttershy wilted a little bit. "I...I noticed that you didn't seem to be enjoying yourself, so I thought maybe that I would bring you some refreshment...that is if you don't mind..."

Luna smiled politely, bending down to take a sip. Berry punch. "Ah, thank you, Lady Fluttershy..."

"Ah, you...you remember my name..." Fluttershy blushed.

"It's a very easy name to remember." Luna turned and faced the little Pegasus fully. "...Then again, I made a note to remember the ones who freed me of the Nightmare..."

"Well...that was more Twilight than me, I mean...we didn't even know what the Elements were until..."

"You can't take a compliment well, can you?"

"N...No, your majesty...I mean, if you say so...that is..."

Luna laughed softly, if not a bit dismissively, "Cute as ever..."

Fluttershy tilted her head, noting Luna's still sullen, if not just annoyed, countenance.

"Well, I will...take my leave...Thank you for your time, your majesty...Please, have a good time, that is, if you're staying..."

Luna watched the Pegasus scurry away.

"She certainly is cute, isn't she?" Celestia asked, peering over Luna's shoulder.

"...Sister, please don't make me throw this drink in your face."

...

And so the ponies danced...

Chapter 10

Two weeks had passed since the big race had come and gone. Life in Ponyville had almost instantly returned to normal the following day. Such as it was in Ponyville. Life remained, ultimately, unchanged, with the exception of Big Macintosh spending most of his evenings over at Twilights library.

Applebloom didn't mind that her big brother was going out more and more with his mare friend. It made her very happy. However, she and the other Cutie Mark Crusaders had sulked for a good three days that an entire week of helping Macintosh train had not rewarded them with their Personal Trainer Cutie Marks.

"So what do we wanna try next?" Applebloom asked as she stared at the ceiling of the Cutie Mark Crusader Secret Headquarters Base Of Operations (translation: Applejacks old tree house located near Sweet Apple Acres). The three of them lay out in a circle, in differing states of bored.

Sweetie Belle rolled over onto her stomach, and used her horn to, just as lazily, drag a piece of parchment towards her, unfurling it just so.
"...Well...There's always English Majors."

Scootaloo and Applebloom exchanged looks, rolling over to look questioningly at Sweetie Belle.

"...I...just started writing things..."

Scootaloo rolled her eyes and turned to Applebloom again. "...So, How's it like havin' Twilight as a sister-in-law?"

"They ain't tied the knot yet." Applebloom corrected. "They need to be dating at least three weeks before we start talkin' bout marriage."

Sweetie Belle sighed. "I wish I had a colt friend."

Scootaloo stuck her tongue out. "Boys are icky...No offense, Applebloom."

"None taken. I concur that mah brother does indeed stink to high Equestria." Applebloom nodded affirmatively. Suddenly, a light bulb flashed over her head. "Hey! I know! We should try and pair up other ponies!"

"I got yelled at for last time..." Scootaloo huffed. "...And you got grounded up till Macintosh asked for our help."

"But it worked, right?" Applebloom sat up, tucking her legs underneath her. "We could be onto something with this. We just need to be more sneaky."

"Sneaky like Ninja!" Sweetie Belle punched a hoof into the air.

"...Seriously, let's just try for our Ninja Cutie Marks..." Scootaloo flopped onto her back.

...

Big Macintosh both enjoyed and hated the off-season down on the farm. It gave him a brief window to relax and smell the roses, but it also meant he didn't have a whole lot to do until the autumn started to show itself and the first crop began. However, just because it was the off-season, didn't mean the work stopped altogether. There was still the fruit stand to run, one of their chief sources of income. However when you have no fruit to sell, you have to buy from a supplier, and in those cases Sweet Apple Acres bought directly from Canterlot Orchards, run by close friends of the family.

"Ah hate dealin' with these curmudgeony sticks in the mud." Applejack snorted as she trotted alongside Macintosh as he pulled the wagon up the cobblestone streets of Canterlots market, the stones white and polished, like the rest of the buildings that surrounded them, only the presence of the occasional ornamental shrub to give the place any sort of natural feel.

"Condescendin', no good crooks, shortin' me last year and chargin' me a whole crate at full price! Why, if gramps was still kickin', he'd have a few choice words to..."

"We're here." Macintosh interrupted his sisters grumbling as he parked the wagon on the curb outside the Canterlot Orchards storefront.

Applejack straightened her mane and practiced smiling pleasantly, and talking very politely. She then sighed and looked to her brother. "Alright,

this is probably gonna be a tick while ah butter these old coots up some. Yah gonna be alright by yerself?"

"I'll just stretch my legs, maybe go get a coffee." Macintosh shrugged. "Try not to start any farm feuds."

"Whyever would mah own brother think of little ol' me like that?" Applejack sashayed up the steps into the store, swishing her tail to and thro.

...

It was already around noon when Trixie bothered to look at the clock. Time had just sort of blended in together the last few days. Her ire at losing the race was long gone, but so was her motivation. Since the race she had had one gig at a fundraiser for the School for Unflighty Pegasus , so she could at the very least afford to eat for another few weeks. Speaking of food, she was hungry, and her ice box was full of condiments, but nothing really to eat. Her stomach echoed an irate sentiment.

If she was going to go out, she needed to not look so disheveled. Her mane was a fright and her coat needed a good long brushing, definitely not presentable, but a quick washing of her face would have to suffice. She got impatient when she was hungry.

Before she left, she made sure to poise herself, preparing a lazy-yet-important sway.

...

The market district of Canterlot was one of the few places in the city that Big Macintosh new much of anything about. He liked it better than a good deal of the rest of the city, as it maintained a sort of old-world charm, married into the high and fancy white and gold that surrounded it. Everything, or almost everything, had a worn, scuffed up look to it. Like the ponies there actually put their hooves on it.

The open air market was also a joy. So many vendors selling all kinds of wares. It was good for him to see how they did business outside of Ponyville. And so many ponies. Macintosh could just park himself on a bench and listen to the market chatter.

"...Pardon me, but are these pinecones fresh?"

"Why yes they are ma'am, fresh from the tree yesterday!"

"Hmm...They're a little flakier than the Great and Powerful Trixie likes them...Do you anything with thicker flakes?"

Macintosh opened an eye, and craned his head to glance behind him. He'd recognize that flank anywhere. He certainly spent enough time staring at it during the race...

"No? Oh very well...I shall make do. Here you go, sir." Trixie fished out the bits from her saddlebag, and accepted the paper bag filled with pinecones.

"Thanks, Trixie. See you next time." The merchant nodded with a smile. This would be perhaps the first time Macintosh had ever seen or heard Trixie use a tone on a level other than "braggart".

"...Morning, ma'am." Macintosh found himself greeting her as she passed, only now realizing he was even there.

Trixie jumped a little at the sudden confrontation, her expression quickly darkening when she saw him. "Mister Macintosh..."

"Fancy seein' you here." Macintosh said, keeping an even tone. Looking neither incensed or pleased to see her.

"Likewise, I'm certain. I live here. Not sure about your excuse...If you'll excuse me." Trixie took the paper bag between her teeth and trotted off.

As he watched her go, he knew he had absolutely nothing to really say to her. He knew they were two entirely separate entities. Maybe it was Twilight starting to rub off on him.

"Hey...No hard feelins', right?" He asked. Trixie stopped dead in her tracks. She glanced back, slipping the bag into her saddle.

"Oh...Absolutely not, Mister Macintosh...You won, fair and square. To the victor goes the prize. That was the agreement, was it not?" The way she spoke told Macintosh that she was thinking of very mean things that she would have rather said.

Macintosh sighed. "Yeah...yeah it was. Twilight was a little worried when you didn't show up at the end."

"Well, I was a little busy digging myself out of the mud." Trixie said tartly. "After I finally wiggled myself free, I wasn't necessarily feeling like appearing before a crowd. I'm sure Twilight will understand. Why she would be worried about me at all, now there's a question. Good day, Mister Macintosh."

-flashback...three days ago-

It was a lazy afternoon, where Twilight Sparkle found some time to do a little bit of independent study, in which she found herself sitting on her window alcove with a book of crypto zoology, amusing herself with the legends of things like the Calfthulu and Slenderpony. The reading served a dual purpose. Trixie had been on her mind even more so the farther they got away from the day of the race. Reading took her mind off her.

Trixie had removed herself, no doubt returning to her life in Canterlot. Or at the very least, by Celestia's mane she hoped so. As irritating and self-serving as she was, Twilight found herself missing her.

"...I...Wanted to at least tell her we could still be friends...I didn't want her to just leave like she'd been exiled..." Twilight had confessed, while Macintosh looked up from where he had been engrossed in an adventure novel of his own.

"I reckon some people just ain't wired in that way, hun." Macintosh propped his chin on a hoof, glancing her way. "I guess for some, when you want to be with someone and they just wanna be buds, they take it as kind of an insult."

Twilight lowered her gaze from her book, staring at the space between her hooves. For a long time, she pondered. She never intended to hurt anyone, and yet she had driven a sharp wedge between her and the very one she had tried to get closest to in the course of it...As she mulled it over, she felt the weight of Big Macintosh as he crawled up into the alcove and wrapped his forelegs around her, pulling her close.

"...And that was when the little Wizard What Could pondered to herself, that she ought go find the bad tempered one..." He nuzzled the back of her neck. "I know that look, hun..."

Twilight leaned against him, putting a hoof over his. "...I wouldn't even know what to say, Mac..."

...

Trixie had gotten maybe a ways down the street before Macintosh caught up with her.

"Listen, I know you don't care none for me, and I don't care much for you either, but there was something I wanted to tell ya if'n I ever crossed paths with you." Macintosh said, keeping pace with her when she quickened her trot.

"And I have absolutely no intention of hearing you out, so please save your breath." Trixie cooed mockingly. "Can't you just be content in your victory and be done with it?"

"It's not about me, Trixie. It's about Twilight."

"Oh really?" Trixie stopped and faced Macintosh, causing the larger horse to back up some. "Has she been all weepy that I didn't come to wish her a wonderful life with you? Or was she just upset I didn't grant everyone an eyeful of the once great and powerful Trixie after crawling around in the mud? I'm sure all of Ponyville wanted to get a good look at me disgraced and defeated, twice, in their township! "

Macintosh narrowed his eyes some. "Sheesh, were you born this nasty or was this something you had to work at?"

Trixie huffed and spun around, flicking Macintosh with her tail. "In my line of work, if you don't learn how to put the Neigh-Sayers down, you're just inviting yourself to be walked on...I let my guard down with Twilight, and I let her walk on me while she walked to you."

"You know well that's not how it went. She told me what happened, you pushed her away."

"Do you blame me for being skeptical?" Trixie snorted, her temper starting to show. "Were you there the first time?" She began doing a squeaky voiced impersonation that might have been Rarity. "Oh what a braggart she is! She needs to learn some humility! Hurr hurr hurr!"

"Well, maybe if you hadn't been playing yourself all high and mighty-" Macintosh started.

"I'M AN ENTERTAINER, YOU IGNORANT PUTZ!" Trixie roared, getting right back in Macintosh's face. "IT'S HOW I MAKE MY LIVING!"

Macintosh could only blink. Trixie wasn't quite finished.

"Let me lay it out for you simple-like, dear...I have to deal with all manners of Ponies in my line of work. The ponies who are easily impressed, right up to the ponies who like to stand in the front row and be snide! When ponies get snide, you put them on the spot, and make it part of the act. Like with your oh so brilliant sister and her compatriots. IT'S A VERY COMMON PRACTICE!"

Macintosh shook his head and get the ringing out of his ears while Trixie huffed and puffed.

"Well, be that as it may, you dug your own grave with that fancy schmancy story about the Ursa-whatsit." Macintosh said whilst rubbing an ear.

"OH YES, let's go back to that, shall we?" Trixie stamped her hooves. "So what if I took one of my mothers bedtime stories and put it to use in my act? Ponies happen to LIKE that story, it brings crowds!"

"That's cause they think you actually did all that!" Macintosh yelled.

"WELL IF YOU WILL EXCUSE ME THAT YOUR LOCAL IDIOT BRIGADE CAN'T DIFFERENTIATE A CHARACTER PIECE TO REAL LIFE!" Trixie shrieked, her mane exploding into flickering blue flames.

Macintosh backpedaled some and fell on his flank as Trixie glared daggers and axes.

"...Look...a'ight...We're not getting' anywhere with this...Just give me a minute to talk to you...civilly-like, and then...whatever happens after that, fine...you won't have to see hide or hair of me again. Savvy?"

"...Make...It...Quick. I'm hungry, and I want to go home and eat my pinecones." Every verb was punctuated with a heated venom grinded behind clenched teeth that made Macintosh wince each time it was struck.

...

"I...I'm sorry...?" Fluttershy stood on her doorstep, looking down at the inquisitive eyes of the Cutie Mark Crusaders.

"Ah SAID..." Applebloom put her hooves around her mouth to make a makeshift megaphone. "Are. You. Dating. Anyone?"

"This is not sneaky like Ninja." Sweetie Belle sighed and kicked a hoof, knowing she was destined for another earful from Rarity.

"Um...Girls..." Fluttershy did her best to keep herself composed despite the embarrassing question. "You...Really shouldn't be going around and asking people about that sort of thing...It's very uncomfortable.., you see. But...No, no I'm not dating anyone..."

"but why not, Fluttershy?" Scootaloo asked. "You're a very pretty pony."

Fluttershy's face turned bright red, feeling herself whither. "Um...Thank you, but...I..Just don't really have anyone I'm interested in. Right now."

"What about Rainbow Dash? You seem to like her a lot." Sweetie Belle said, recalling many instances in the past. "Even Pinkie Pie."

"Oh...Yes, well...That's...Different...Me and Rainbow Dash...We don't...You see, me and her don't like the same things...I mean, I would love to be with her, yes, but...She isn't...I mean...She's..." Each word brought her into a curled up position on her doorstep, wings attempting to form some sort of protective barrier to hide her embarrassment.

It was about that time that Rainbow Dash herself arrived, diving out of the air, doing a few impressive loops, before skidding to a halt in front of the Crusaders.

"Well, if it isn't everyone's favorite achievers!" Rainbow Dash said brightly. "You're not causing trouble for Fluttershy are ya? There's no Cutie Mark for that!"

"Rainbow Dash!" Scootaloo hopped up and down. "No ma'am! We would never bother Fluttershy! We were just-MPPH!" Applebloom tackled Scootaloo, shoving a hoof in her mouth.

"We were just leavin'! Yeah! We got a lot of...Cutie Mark Associated Things...that need...doing...and stuff! C'mon Sweetie Belle!"

...

As the Crusaders took their leave, dragging Scootaloo with them, Rainbow Dash raised a curious brow before shrugging and looking to Fluttershy.

"What's gotten into you? You ready to help me out with that new trick?" She asked.

"I...Yes...Let's go..." Fluttershy scuttled along, still curled up into a tortoise-like defensive shell.

...

"...My mother and father were both well distinguished scholars at the academy..." Trixie poured a cup of tea and nudged it towards Macintosh as they sat across from each other at Trixie's little kitchen table. Trixie's temper had run cold after listening to what Macintosh had had to say. "They both had high hopes for me and my brothers, that we would rise to distinction ourselves at the royal academy for gifted Unicorns..."

She nodded to several photographs she had on her walls, of a couple no doubt her parents, two proud looking Ponies, standing outside the academy. Her glow began to glow as she manipulated a spoon to stir her own cup. "...Well, life sometimes has a funny way of working...My Cutie Mark arrived when I was ten. A magic wand. The same as my Grandfather...The Amazing Mr. Hat..."

"...Wha...?" Macintosh tilted his head wearing an expression of incredulity. "The Amazing Mr. Hat...The pony that sawed Princess Celestia in half..."

"The very one. He was a remarkable pony, and well versed in the art of stage magic...and my mother and fathers bane...They were embarrassed to be associated with someone who's special talent was trickery and illusion...So much more that it broke their hearts when their little girl was destined to follow in his path. It made life more than a little awkward until I finally left home for the academy. "

"Well, I see you have yer certificate...So I reckon you finished schoolin'." Mac nodded to the framed certificate, signed by Celestia herself.

"Indeed...But by then, I had all I could take of conventional magic and the theories and practices behind it...I was a rebellious little filly then. I wanted to live up to my destiny, not my parents expectations...I became my grandfathers assistant...Back then, I was simply known as the Fabulous Trixie. You know...motioning to things, being sawn in half, being the guinea pig for all the trickery, wearing ridiculous outfits...

"We toured Equestria for several years. I would dare say they were the happiest years of my life. But...My grandfather Hat was very old, way before I joined him. His health had never been perfect, but he had been a master at hiding his ailments behind that...Bravado. That...Overwhelming charisma...It was something I deeply admired about him...Even when my mother accused him of being a charlatan to his face, he refused to let things get to him...

"Inevitably...He passed. In his will, he left his carriage, his steamer trunk of tricks, his books...all to me. He wanted me to carry on with my destiny."

"So, when did you become the Great and Powerful name?" Macintosh asked.

"...Being an entertainer is a difficult road to trot, Mr. Macintosh..." Trixie took a long sip of her tea. "You have to strive to impress, or people don't book you. And there's always ponies more than willing to play dirty to rip the red carpet from underneath you...I did little venues here and there, but I didn't achieve real work until I took my show to Manehattan for the All Wide Magicians Competition. A show of skill, and pizzazz. Well...I was scheduled number 26. And there was one other girl...A real piece of work, went for shock value to get a rise out of her audience. Tasteless...Heh, anyway, she didn't like me from the word go, even less when I got the spot

and she was turned down for the competition...And she rigged it so I got locked in a broom closet so she could take over my spot."

"Bow howdy."

"Indeed. Well, this was one of those situations where being accustomed to being stuffed in a container and made to disappear came in handy...But I waited, for just the right moment. I watched from hiding as the little rat made claim that I had fallen ill, and that she would be taking my place. Well...She started with a headline act, rather than starting small...the barrel and swords. Quaint. She called one of the ponies from the audience to be the one to shove swords into the barrel while she crawled inside, and made yelping noises, well under the barrel from a trap door."

"And then?"

"It got deathly silent after the fourth sword, and everyone got worried when the barrel stopped wiggling. When the nervous pony assistant opened the lid, out I sprang, in all my glory, and directed the audience's attention to my rival, whom I now had tangled in the cables over the stage, frantically scrambling to untangle herself, proclaiming that THAT was why you never mess with the Grrreat and Powerrrrful Trrrixie!" Trixie said in her typical vibrance. "...And thus, the name stuck."

"So that's how it happened." Macintosh nodded.

"Mm hmm...After that, it didn't take much to get jobs in and around Manehattan...Fillydelphia...Even Canterlot. I perfected the act, turning the tables on those who would try to disarm and disrupt me...So you might be wondering why the Ursa Major story..."

"It had crossed my mind."

"My Mother used to tell us foals a story about a little girl who got lost in the woods and encountered a fearsome bear, and escaped it by tricking it with her magic. I had a trick in my arsenal, where I would do light shows to tell a story, and at an affair, I did the story of the girl and the bear...One of the audience members asked me if it was a true story, and...well, not being the one to turn down a good bid to sell seats, I said yes...From there, the story became a regular part of my act, and as all stories do, it evolved, and the

more fancy and impressive the light show became. I saw the mention of an Ursa Major in one of my grandfathers books, so...why not?"

...

Macintosh and Trixie talked for a good stretch longer, whatever animosity that may have been there between the two had vanished. Eventually, Macintosh figured it was time to return to his sister before she decided to turn Canterlot on it's backside looking for him.

"...So, you gonna consider what I told you about?" Macintosh asked as they stood on her doorstep.

Trixie sighed some. "...Give me a few days, Mr. Macintosh. If...What you say is so...I need to do some serious thinking, put some things in perspective..."

"You take your time. I'll be waitin'." Macintosh, for the first time, actually smiled at Trixie, who bade him a slight smile of her own.

"Goodbye, Mr. Macintosh."

...

Applejack was furious when Macintosh finally found her fuming at the applecart outside the storefront. "Well, well, look who finally decided to crawl out of the woodwork!" She growled.

"Got caught up elsewhere. Mighty sorry 'bout that, sis." Macintosh hooked himself up to the cart, filled with a few dozen crates of apples bought to sustain the farm until the harvest came.

Applejack huffed and nudged him to "get at traffic", the cart creaking as they made their way down the flagstone streets of Canterlot for the long road home.

"What were you doin', anyways?"

"Ran into someone I had some business with."

"Eh? Who in...Oh no you didn't...You muttonhead, ah tolds ya to let sleepin' dogs lie!"

"Wasn't like that, AJ."

"Well, what happened? You buck her one or something'?"

"Nope."

"You even gonna give me a proper answer?"

"Nope."

"Gah...Was ah some sort of devil demon dragon to deserve such a knot headed brother?"

"Eeyup."

"Don't make me get the spurs, ya yella bellied mule."

Chapter 11

Twilight Sparkle was awoken by the sun spilling in through her window, warming the room pleasantly. She smiled to herself and relished in the comfort of her pillow and her blanket. She was woefully alone at this moment, the space that had occupied the large red workhorse now empty. Big Macintosh got up, by Twilights logic, unreasonably early, even when he didn't have to be down on the farm. He was always so careful not to wake her when he let himself out, that she could almost swear he hadn't been there at all if not for his lingering scent on her pillow.

Another smell wafted in through the cracked door. The pleasant scent of breakfast being cooked. It coaxed her from her blissfully comfortable spot under her quilt as she rolled out of bed, and down the ladder.

...

Big Macintosh knew his way well around a kitchen. Coming from a large family like his, he'd often been roped into helping with cooking up the brunches and dinners whenever the family decided to come visit. Granted, Twilights kitchen was a far cry from Granny Smiths kitchen back down on the farm. Twice now he'd almost put the biscuit mix in the cupboard with the pots and pans, and kept opening the drawer where the mixing tools were for some reason.

As he stirred the oatmeal, he was gently interrupted by a smaller purple form nuzzling up against his side.

"It smells good." Twilight said, giving him a tender kiss good morning.

"Eeyup." Macintosh nuzzled her back, turning to trot over to the ice box. "Should be ready here in just a few-What in the...?" Macintosh jumped back a bit as a tray was thrust towards him as he opened the ice box, a baking sheet with several ornate cupcakes with orange frosting on them.

"Finally! You know how long I've been in here?" Pinkie Pie hopped out of the ice box, setting the tray on the nearby table. "At least ten minutes!"

"Bu-But..." Macintosh squinted his eyes and scratched his head. "I been in here for almost an hour, an..."

"...Don't. I stopped trying to understand how she does it a loonnnnggg time ago..." Twilight swished her tail against his, looking to regard Pinkie Pie.
"...So, Cupcake delivery for breakfast?"

"Yup you betcha! Some strange pony came and woke me up real early this morning, saying it was absolutely IMPERATIVE that I make a special batch of cupcakes. At first I thought it was you, Twilight, but you don't have blue hair. Yours is more of a grape and watermelon flavor. Hers was ALL blueberry!"

"E-Eh...You don't say..." Twilight felt a bead of sweat slide down the side of her head, smiling uncertain but politely.

Pinkie Pie nodded with seriousness. "MMM HMM! She paid me for the cupcakes and asked me to make sure these got to you as soon as possible! Isn't that nice of her? I wish somepony would send ME surprise breakfast cupcakes!"

"Pinkie Pie, you work in a bakery, you can make cupcakes whenever you want." Twilight pointed out. Pinkie Pie paused, and both Twilight and Macintosh could hear the gears slowly creaking in her head.

"Oh yeah, huh?" Pinkie mused. "WELL! I promised I'd help Fluttershy collect eggs this morning. See ya!" And with that, the pink pony bounced back into the ice box, slamming the door behind her. Twilight and Macintosh exchanged worried and confused looks, then both let out a startled yelp as Pinkie bounced suddenly passed the kitchen window and down the road.

"...How in tarnation does she do that...?" Macintosh asked.

"...It's better not to ask...To ask such questions is to risk madness." Twilight said rather matter-of-factly. Both then turned their gaze on the tray of cupcakes that had just been delivered. A minute or two passed.

"...There's something wrong with these, aren't there?" Twilight asked.

"...Mmaybe..." Macintosh trotted over to the utensil drawer and returned to a spatula between his teeth. He then promptly began poking the cupcakes.

Twilight suppressed a smirk and shook her head. "...Brilliant investigation, Dr. Macintosh."

Both shared a laugh, and were promptly interrupted by a knock on Twilights door.

"...Oh, who could that be?" Twilight scrunched up her nose and trotted out to the door. The library didn't open to the public until nine, and she was really looking forward to Macintosh's breakfast.

She opened the door, clearing her throat. "Yes, can I help you...? The library doesn't open until-" She was suddenly all but run over by an all blue Pegasus and a female white Pegasus with purple stripes running through her mane.

"Twilight! My sweet little biscuit!" The white and purple Pegasus glomped onto Twilight, nuzzling on her affectionately. "I am SO PROUD OF YOU!"

"M-m-mom? D-d-dad?" Twilight squeaked. "I..I didn't know you two were visiting Ponyville."

"We wanted to surprise you, honeybunch, now where's that future son-in-law of mine?" Mister Sparkle glanced around the room, spying the big red stallion come trotting in from the kitchen.

"Ah, we got guests?" Macintosh asked as he suddenly found a hoof seized by the male Pegasus, whom shook it with great vigor.

"You must be Macintosh! I'm Twilights father, it is an absolute pleasure to finally meet you!" Mister Sparkle nearly exploded.

"Well, right kind to make your acquaintance at long last yerself, sir." Macintosh smiled, giving the smaller pony a firm hoof on the shoulder, almost knocking Mister Sparkle over.

"Oh, they're getting along! Wonderful! We were so worried when those flyers got passed around in Canterlot! But now I can see that all that worry was for nothing!" Mrs. Sparkle gushed as she hugged on Twilight.

"Ah, those...Well, I WAS going to tell you and dad, but things..." Twilight blushed and felt a Fluttershy moment coming on. "...Things just sort of happened, and I was...a little too busy to write you a letter...I-I'm sorry..."

"Oh don't be sorry, I couldn't be happier! My baby has finally broken out of her shell!" Once more Mrs. Sparkle gripped her daughter close, tight enough to elicit a croak from Twilight.

"Hey...Twi..." The group turned to see a groggy, sluggish baby dragon slither into the room, rubbing at his eyes. "...Oh, Mr. and Mrs. Sparkle..." He yawned.

"Spike! How are you, old chap?" Mr. Sparkle gave Spike a headlock and a noogie, which the dragon grunted and accepted with a touch of ire.

"...Ah, I didn't sleep much last night. Twilight, if Macintosh is gonna be spending the night, give me word in advance so I can...I dunno, move my bed into another room? You guys kept me up half the night..."

The room fell silent, as her parents eyes fell on Twilight with curiosity and suspicion. Twilight's face turned dark red, and Macintosh scratched the back of his head and coughed. Twilight let out a nervous laugh and immediately began shuffling Spike back into the bedroom. "Terribly sorry about it, little partner, but why don't you go ahead and take the morning off and then I'll see about getting you some sapphires for lunch, alright? Alright!" She braced herself against the door after shuffling Spike inside. "Hey! Alright, well we were just about to have breakfast so why don't we-"

Another knock emanated from the door.

Twilight suppressed the urge to scream, forcing a smile as she ushered her parents and Macintosh into the living room. "Well! I wonder who that could be? You three just have a seat and I'll be right there!"

...

Twilight mumbled under her breath as she trotted sharply to the door. "What is today? Pester Twilight Before Breakfast Day? Do I have a sign on my door that says 'Everypony I know, apply within'?" She was about to greet her new quest with the tartest 'hello' she could muster, but she found

the words caught in her throat as a radiant smile beamed down at her amidst a rainbow main and shimmering white fur.

"Good morning, Twilight." Celestia bowed her head in greeting to her student.

"P-Princess! What a surprise!" Twilight scampered to bow in respect. "T-To what do I owe this visit?"

"Oh I have a meeting with Mayor Mare later today, and it was such a beautiful morning after raising the sun, that I thought perhaps I should check in on my dutiful student and see how her relationship was faring. You don't mind the intrusion, do you?"

"Not at all, m-my parents are here as well...Heh heh, please, my home is yours..."

...

Lyra and Bon Bon were on their way to the pond to feed the ducks, as was their ritual on days such as these, when they paused by the road to the Library, observing the four stoic white and gold Pegasus stationed outside.

"Well, must be nice to get house calls from the Princess herself." Lyra grumbled. "I wish I was important like that."

Bon Bon gave her a quick peck on the cheek. "You're important to me, now hurry with that baguette."

...

"Oh, and here's Twilight eating her first plate of alfalfa!" Mrs. Sparkle giggled as she sat between Twilight and Celestia, the couch flanked by two of Celestia, an old photo book open in her lap. In it, a Twilight as a mere foal was sitting in her high chair, her face buried in a big plate of alfalfa like it was the most awesome thing ever. Celestia giggled softly, while Twilight withered with embarrassment. Her mother was showing her superior her baby pictures...

"Ah, and here she is, blowing out her birthday candles repeatedly because the silly filly thought she could get her Cutie Mark that way." Twilight puffed her cheeks while the two mares enjoyed another giggle.

Macintosh emerged setting out some fresh coffee. "Food'll be a bit longer. Need to make enough to go around, and all. Hope you don't mind the wait, Yer highness."

"Oh not at all, Master Macintosh." Celestia sipped her tea. "Hmmm...How about I give you a hand? I'm actually quite fond of the kitchen."

All four ponies sputtered into their drinks.

"Oh! That's not necessary, yer highness!" Macintosh held up his hooves. "It ain't no trouble at all not none!"

"Pish posh." Celestia was already trotting into Twilights kitchen. "Come, Master Macintosh, let's make breakfast."

Macintosh swallowed and obeyed, turned to look at the group with a 'remember me as I was' glance. Everyone waved a hoof to him, unsure if they would ever see him again.

...

"You know...Really, I can take care of it...I've cooked for thirty or so ponies before." Macintosh said as Celestia used her magic to tie one of Twilights aprons on herself.

"But I want to her." She said cheerfully, following it up with a sigh as she set about to work, chopping some potatoes for the hash browns. "It can get so tiring having everyone insist on doing everything for you..."

"Well, I reckon that's so..." Macintosh got back to making the biscuits.

"So...how is everything between you and Twilight?" Celestia asked.

"Er...We're good. Takin' things nice and casual." Macintosh thought for a moment. "I mean, not casual as in, just foolin' around, no no, we...uh...we're takin' it easy...Not that Twilight is easy! No,s he, uh, she can be right hard sometimes...I mean-"

"It's alright, Macintosh. I understand...How was your visit to Canterlot last week?" Celestia asked, setting the chopped potatoes aside, suddenly spying a plate of orange frosted cupcakes. "Ooh, these are my favorite...May I?"

Macintosh felt himself go rigid at the mention of Canterlot, giving Celestia a nod as she gleefully nibbled on the baked treat. "Canterlot was good...We, uh, we were visitin' a supplier...for the farm..."

"You also visited Trixie, did you not?" There was a sly fashion in the way Celestia glanced at him, a dollop of orange frosting on her nose.

"We...uh...We met." Macintosh tried to focus on his cooking. "You talked about something."

"We did."

"Not...the trouble making variety, I presume...?" Celestia sashayed across the kitchen to set the bowl of chopped potatoes by his side.

"O-Of course not, ma'am, I would never..." Macintosh locked eyes with Celestia, who was now very close, staring into his with an enigmatic glimmer, like she was staring directly into his soul. It made Macintosh feel ashamed. Clearing his throat, he looked Celestia in the eye. "...Nuttin' happened."

This seemed to satisfy the princess, a soft smile gracing her as she went about her duty in lending a hand in breakfast. Macintosh couldn't have felt more uncomfortable being alone in a room with a single pony if that pony had a stick of dynamite tied to her flank.

...

Celestia was already at Twilights. At current, she was doing something...Domestic. Her mood kept shifting from playful, to a sudden serious drop, but then it went back to being playful. She was in proximity to Big Macintosh, that much could be detected. That particular presence was hard to mistake. Macintosh's mood was in an even uncomfortable state. However, there was no indication that the expected chastising had or would even take place.

Princess Luna was most displeased. She had personally delivered evidence of Macintosh's meeting with Trixie to Celestia, evidence of infidelity...or at least infidelity according to the way things were done in Equestria...1000 years ago. Luna went from being displeased, to just feeling old.

Luna stepped out of the magic circle drawn in her darkened study, almost too tired to even care anymore. She was becoming the very definition of the jealous ex-lover, and she found it to be a most unattractive aspect. She had already made it quite clear that she and Macintosh could never be the couple that she wanted them to be. He would never be accepted by the high class as her consort. He would have been miserable. Nor could they have just gone on as they had. But they hadn't, not since Macintosh started having eyes for Twilight Sparkle. It made Luna both tired and annoyed, as she flopped onto her circular bed, draped in silken royal blue sheets.

=Flashback=

"It won't work, Macintosh...Your sister and her friends would run me right out of Ponyville after that last display. I'm better off alone." The voice of Trixie had grabbed Luna's attention as she was going about her stroll among the people in disguise...her way of getting to know her subjects by observing and interacting. It was the marvel of a well made cape and hood. As far as anyone knew, she was but one of many students from the academy with a penchant for dramatic aversion of the sun.

"I can handle mah sister, and if need be, knock some sense inta her if she gets rowdy." Macintosh was walking alongside her. Luna raised an eyebrow curiously, starting to shadow them as they made their way across town from the market.

"But why?" Trixie stopped suddenly, forcing Luna to duck behind a refuse bin. There was an unpleasant odor that distracted her from paying attention to what was being said. Now Mac was talking, with her only catching the end of his statement.

"I'm more than willin' to give this a shot if you are...At worst, we both get run outta Ponyville."

"You're willing to put a lot on the line to make her happy. I envy that about you, Mister Macintosh." Trixie sighed. Luna saw none of that thick

headedness now. She was fully disarmed, but seemed more than ready to bring up her defenses if need be. What was Macintosh up to?

"When ya love someone, there's no limit to how far you need to go. We both love her...Right?"

"Yes...Yes, I suppose we do."

"Then what's the problem? She wants ya at be part o' her life...as much as ah wanna be part o' hers."

"The race-"

"The race was just us being bull-headed foals with no idea what we was doin' to Twilight. I see that now. And it was right selfish of us not to see it."

"If you haven't noticed, Mister Macintosh, I can be very selfish."

"An I don't buy into that. I'd bet the farm that's none but an act you put on to go with that "Great and Powerful" title you carry 'round."

Trixie scoffed. "You act like you know me so well, Macintosh."

"Maybe I wanna."

"What?"

"Maybe I wanna see what it is Twilight see's."

Shortly after, the two continued on their way, Luna hanging back, her mind calculating and arranging everything she just heard. Macintosh, consorting with both Trixie and Twilight, together? The very notion nearly made her thought process shut down. How shameful! How inappropriate! Twilight was already neglecting her duty to her studies in the endeavor that led to this, and now she was bordering on the precipice of an entirely delinquent relationship with more than one pony!

Celestia WOULD hear of this.

=End Flashback=

...And Celestia apparently did not give a grain...A quick glance back revealed they were all eating breakfast now...And being very merry together. How could she approve of such a thing? Maybe Macintosh denied any and all. He must have recognized the Cupcakes were a warning of Celestia's impending arrival so he made up an alibi. Granted, she had only requested the cupcakes of the Pink One to ensure that Celestia first visited Twilight, to catch them early in the morning, perhaps doing something inappropriate for two Ponies not yet wed.

Luna stopped herself...She had one of her socks clenched between her teeth and was pulling on it angrily. She was angry, very angry indeed. Macintosh had been hers, and all hers, for those brief few weeks until he started to stray from her...Reverse Psychology had failed to draw him back...And now he was so far gone away from her...

"This isn't how things were supposed to work out!" Luna kicked her feet and collapsed in a heap on her bed. "I don't approve, I don't approve, I don't approve! Why does no one ever care about what I approve of?" She sulked into her sheets. "...I'm a princess too you know..."

...

"Thank you so much for breakfast, Twilight. And it was a pleasure meeting you again, Mr. and Mrs. Sparkle." Princess Celestia bade the group farewell, finding it time to get on with her royal schedule.

"Oh, it was our pleasure, your highness." Twilight bowed. "I'm always happy to receive you in my home."

As the royal party took their leave, there was a heavy sigh of relief. No matter how...aloof and casual the Princess acted in front of her subjects, she never disappointed in bringing ponies on edge. Macintosh in particular was happy to see the princess leave. All through breakfast, she was casting him studious glances, like she was trying to read his mind.

"Well...Guess I should make myself useful." Macintosh announced. "Sis might need a hoof loadin' the cart..."

"Aw..." Twilight pouted. "Well, I'll be sure to have something nice made for dinner tonight, as thanks for all the hard work." She nuzzled up on Mac, eliciting a adoring squeal from her mother.

...

"Such a nice young pony." Mrs. Sparkle mused as they ventured back inside. Twilight was about to shut the door behind her, when she heard a distinct "psst" sound. More precisely, a "psst" sound coming from her bushes. Her curiosity trigger, she trotted over to the shrub.

"Yes...?" She asked the shrub.

The bush shook some, and she heard a softly uttered "oh bugger", before a unicorn's horn poked out of it.

"...G-good morning, Twilight..."

"Trixie...? Is that you?" Twilight drew back the limbs, revealing the curled up unicorn inside, who was staring up at her with a slight hint of indignance in her eyes.

"...Is Macintosh in residence?" She asked simply.

"Er...No, he just left to go see Applejack." Twilight tilted her head, glancing around before leaning into the bush. "What are you doing here?"

Trixie's expression didn't divert much from the stubborn look as she sat there in the shrubbery, except for the slight blush that crept across her cheeks. "Well, to be honest, I am not entirely sure what led me out here this morning. Nonetheless, I'm here, we both can attest to that...and I think perhaps there was some things that I wanted to discuss with you..."

"Oh I see...That's great, because there was something I wanted to-"

"Hey Twilight!" A voice called to Twilight, as she looked up from the bush, to see Rainbow Dash coming in for a landing on her walkway.

"Rainbow Dash, wow, a few more and I'll have seen everyone this morning." Twilight giggled.

"Uh, right." Rainbow Dash gave her a confused look before continuing.

"Anyhay, my informants in the field have reported that a certain show pony may be in town, for nefarious purposes." She saluted, as though she was delivering a combat report.

"And when you say your informant, you mean Scootaloo, right?" Twilight asked, a little amused.

Rainbow Dash waved a hoof dismissively. "Yeah, yeah, look what I'm saying is ponies have seen Trixie sneaking around town, and we both know she can't be up to anything good. We're keeping an eye for her, so don't you worry."

Twilight shook her head in some dismay, but smiled all the same. "Well, I appreciate the intel, Lt. Dash."

...

After Rainbow Dash left, soaring off to do whatever it was she did with her day, Trixie pondered perhaps that she was due for a mane-dye and a name change. She contemplated how The Great and Powerful Stephanie would look in lights.

"So, where were we...?" Twilight poked her head back in the bush.

...

"We're not getting anywhere with this..." Sweetie Belle kicked a little rock as she and Applebloom strolled along. "No one wants to talk to us about their love lives."

"Yeah, if Scootaloo dun come up with nuttin' from Dash, we may as well...Hold up..." Applebloom stopped, ducking into the tall grass along the road.

"What? What is it?" Sweetie Belle asked. Applebloom yanked her into the grass and pointed towards Twilights treehouse.

"Twilights place?" Sweetie Belle asked, confused. "What's so strange about that?"

"Why's Twilight talkin' inta that bush?" Applebloom watched on.

...

"Twilight, are you alright out there?" Twilights mother called from inside.

"Just fine, Mother, just cleaning my step!" Twilight called back, before regarding the bush. "...I'll open a window upstairs...Can you manage?"

Trixie nodded.

"Twilight?" Her mother called once more.

"Coming!"

...

"I still don't see..." Sweetie Belle was starting to lost her patience.

"Wait wait, who's that comin' outta that bush?" Applebloom asked.

Up ahead, they watched on as Trixie tip-hoofed out of the bushes and cast some sort of spell on her own hooves, before beginning to scale the treehouse. Up on the second floor, they saw Twilight open a window, and wave to Trixie, looking around rather suspiciously before vanishing back inside. Trixie climbed up to the window, and scampered inside, shutting the window behind her.

"What in tarnation...?" Applebloom muttered.

Sweetie Belle pondered for a moment before the light bulb went off in her head. "OH MAH GOSH!"

"Sssh!" Applebloom hissed. "What what?"

"I read about this in sisters books! It's ah...Infe...Infidel...Infinite Deli Meat?"

"Infidelity?"

"Ah, thanks Rarity. Yes, Infideli-SIS!" Both fillies jumped, now face to face with a rather cross Rarity.

"So, it's true what I've been hearing about you three going around and asking embarrassing questions." Rarity scolded.

"Bu...But we was only tryin' to help." Applebloom sulked.

"And sis! We saw something bad! Like, real bad!" Sweetie Belle insisted.

"I know you did, I saw it too." Rarity shook her head with a sigh. "I'm the one who got her into all of this, and now I feel I've led her down a dark path of heartbreak and despair..."

"What do you mean, sis?" Sweetie Belle asked.

Rarity narrowed her eyes, staring off into the distance. "She has tasted a forbidden fruit, the Love Triangle...She can no longer be satisfied with just one, and now she toys with both of them...Oh, my dear dear friend, what have I done to you...? But fear not, Twilight!...Big Sister Rarity has a plan."

Chapter 12

Rarity had become obsessed.

Five days had passed since Rarity, Sweetie-Belle and Applebloom had been witness to Trixie sneaking into Twilight Sparkles home, with Twilights assistance. Rarity had been adamant about shouldering the blame for Twilights unfaithfulness to poor, sweet Big Macintosh, dedicating every spare minute she had outside of work to studying and gleaming from her various novels of romance and debauchery for some inspiration to go with her plan to return Twilight to the light.

The affair needed to be exposed, but only to the involved parties. Celestia forbid Applejack catch wind of it, or all of Ponyville might be rendered to splintered ruin in her fury and pursuit. She needed a way of ensuring that Twilight, Macintosh, and Trixie crossed paths at the same time, while Twilight was in the company of one or the other. That was the general plan. For that, she needed info.

"Sis, why are we in the bushes again?" Sweetie-Belle asked as she batted at an offending limb that kept brushing her face, while Rarity peered intently through a pair of binoculars aimed straight at the Library, the window lights coming on as late evening approached.

"Because, dear, we need to observe Twilight and Trixie..." Rarity readjusted the leopard print pitch helmet she was wearing, ensuring her perm hadn't been too terribly disturbed. "...Now, read to me what you and Scootaloo documented yesterday."

Sweetie-Belle sighed and pulled out a notebook. "Lunch Time, Twilight meets with Pinkie Pie. Went to bakery. Scootaloo and I ate a brownie. Met with Applebloom shortly after. Lost sight of Twilight. Saw her again an hour later. She went home. 4pm- Thought heard a sneeze from the balcony, turned out to be Spike. Returned home to meet with you."

Rarity blinked. "That's all?"

"We didn't wanna break into her place twice!" Sweetie-Belle protested.

"Touché, my love, touché." Rarity conceded as she returned to her binoculars. "Ooooh, I know she's still in there. Unless she's been coming and going in the dead of night. How sneaky of her...and yet, subtly romantic..."

"Can I go home now? I'm hungry." Sweetie-Belle asked.

"Ah, yes of course, dear...Make me a salad, and put it in the ice box for me, would you?" Rarity said, taking her eyes off of the library just long enough to miss a cloaked figure dark across the field in and into Twilights bedroom window.

...

Trixie was getting a bit tired of all the sneaking around, not that she didn't understand the reasoning behind it. After going to all that trouble to publicly announce which of the two, Trixie or Mactintosh, would be dating Twilight Sparkle, this new arrangement was definitely a social arrangement one...eased into, rather than shouting from your open window.

Trixie trotted into the living room, where Twilight was busy with her nose stuck in a volume of lore and knowledge, thick enough to kill a pony by Trixie's analysis. Twilight soon diverted her attention to Trixie, smiling pleasantly..

"How'd the show go?" She asked, referring to the engagement in Manehattan Trixie had ventured off to attend. Trixie crawled up onto the couch alongside Twilight and let out a weary, if not a bit frustrated, sigh.

"...I've suffered worse crowds for better money." Trixie admitted with her head turned up high.

"Well, keep your chin up...Not like that, you know what I mean. I bet you'll knock them dead next time." Twilight returned her attention to her book. Her attention didn't remain there for long, as she felt somepony's gaze burning a hole in the side of her head. Turning back to Trixie, she was graced with Trixie looking at Twilight with a wide eyed gaze, while her head was tilted a bit at a downward angle, hooves neatly curled in front of her. This was, Twilight discovered, Trixies "cute" look. It also doubled as her

"pay attention to me, please" look, a more...adorable...variation of the "pay attention to me, peasants!" expression she used in her show. It was her "subtle" way of expressing she wanted to be affectionate. Twilight simply smiled and scooted closer to Trixie, nuzzling her nose against her neck.

"Silly Trixie..." Twilight purred.

"D-don't tease me..." Trixie used her cute voice, pawing at Twilight with her curled forelegs. "I haven't seen you since yesterday."

Twilight giggled and closed the book. Now that Trixie was home, she could get started on dinner. She could already hear Spike puttering around upstairs complaining he was starving to death.

"No Macintosh tonight?" Trixie asked, laying her head down on the couch as Twilight got up to trot into the kitchen.

"Not tonight. I guess Granny Smith was giving him a small guilt trip about always spending the night over here and not with the family."

Trixie felt her heart skip. In the days since she and Macintosh had discussed this...shared relationship...she had yet to spend a night alone with Twilight. Her imagination was already beginning to run off with her, picturing herself under Twilights quilt, and Twilight saucily crawling towards her across the bed, whilst purring 'don't worry...I'll be gentle'.

"What's with that expression?" a boyish voice rattled Trixie out of her fantasy, looking down to see Spike looking up at her, a scaly brow arched questioningly. Trixie shook her head, laughing uneasily. "Oh, nothing, little one. Just...compiling my thoughts?"

Spike hated it when Trixie called him 'little one'. He didn't need the reminder. "Right, well Twi wants to know how you like your grass."

...

It was during dinner that Twilight suddenly took notice how...old Trixie's cape was. The colors were definitely faded, and the collar had a rip in it. She pointed it out, politely of course, however Trixie cursed all the same under her breath, pulling the garment off to inspect the frayed thread.

"...Ooh, great, now I have to make a trip all the way into Canterlot to get this fixed..."

"I could have Rarity fix it for you." Twilight suggested.

"Oh, but...Wouldn't that expose us a bit...prematurely?" Trixie asked.

"Oh don't worry about it. I'll just mix it in with some things I need to take to her anyway tomorrow. She never charges me for simple mending"

"Well...It would save me a few bits..." Trixie ran her hoof over the rip in the fabric of her grandfathers cape. An then imagined what horrors Rarity would visit upon it if she knew if it was hers.

Spike looked to Twilight, gnawing on a lapis lazuli. "...Does she always faint like that?"

...

In the theater, the audience goes "my what a good scene that was". The actor, on the other hand, goes "I can't believe my pacing was off." When the rains come in Ponyville, everyone goes "what a delightful drizzle". The weather team captain goes "I think we may have gotten the west fields a little too damp."

Always the same, when you are a professional, you tend to always see the mistakes you make more than the successes. The same goes into bringing the night. Bringing the day was simple. Wipe the sky clean, make it blue, summon forth the burning sphere. The night required a bright white disc, the proper shade of a blackish blue sky, and then, the stars. Good heavens, the stars. Princess Luna mused to herself that she could spend all night, and still think they weren't quite right, just before Celestia came to wipe her canvas clean all over again.

Her satisfaction with her work had flatlined in the previous few days. She found herself now sitting on a bench, staring up at her nights work, nitpicking how the constellations weren't spaced right, that cluster was too clustered...That star shouldn't even be there...

"Excuse me...?" A soft voice chimed in, disturbing Luna's critique of her work. Beside her, a yellow Pegasus with a pink mane was sitting there, watching her.

"Oh...Lady Fluttershy...I didn't hear you approach..." Luna nodded to her. In greeting.

"Well, I mean...I noticed that you were sitting in my front yard..." Fluttershy motioned to the bench itself, which was situated not far from Fluttershy's front door.

"Oh, I see..." Luna ran a hoof over the smooth wood.

"Not that I mind, you are the Princess after all..." Fluttershy quickly added, before tilting her head curiously. "...But, what are you doing here?"

"Just...looking at the stars, I suppose." Luna looked skyward, Fluttershy doing the same.

"...They're so beautiful."

"They're rubbish."

"Oh...I-I see...If you say so..."Luna sighed.

"...I'm just being difficult..." Luna said.

"Would you...like to be alone?" Fluttershy asked. Luna shook her head.

"No...I'm a little tired of being alone...That's how it was back then you know...All alone." Luna mused. "...I would go out, and bring the night, but there was no one to talk to...Everyone was afraid of the dark...Afraid of me, perhaps. Sister always said it was something else the subjects feared. What I would have given for one soul to speak with then..."

"I'm sorry." Fluttershy said.

"Hmm? Oh...I'm just talking to myself again..."

"But I'm listening."

"I...T-that's true, isn't it?"

"Princess?"

"Yes, Fluttershy?"

"What was Equestria like back then...?"

"Oh...Well, I was very young when sister brought me to this world, after she banished the evil Nightmare and the Darkponies that had enslaved the Earth Ponies..."

...

Twilight hummed as she used her levitation magic to brush her teeth, tilting her head side to side. In the mirror, she could see Trixie dressing into her powder blue, star printed pajama's.

"Mmm mhrrr myrrh mmmm." Twilight attempted.

"Rinse and spit, my love, rinse and spit." Trixie instructed, using her magic to fasten the buttons on her pajama top. Twilight gargled and spat.

"...I said, you know, you're the only one in this house that wears clothes."

"Well...it's not a crime to like the feel of fabrics, now is it?" Trixie stated haughtily, turning with a swish of the tail to trot into the bedroom.

Crawling into bed, Twilight took her favored position in the middle, on her back, with her front hooves resting on her stomach. Trixie wiggled in next to her, fidgeting some. And then fidgeting more. Twilight cracked an eye.

"...I think this is Macintosh's side of the bed..." Trixie grunted as she shifted her flank around under the blanket.

"...How can you tell?" Twilight asked, closing her eyes again.

"...There's this big...Macintosh shape indent in your mattress." Trixie explained.

"Then get on the other side..." Twilight suggested. She had a moment of quiet before she 'oof'ed as Trixie crawled over her to get at the other side of the bed., and then more wiggling and shifting. Then Trixie sighed in approval. Twilight sighed as well.

"Goodnight, Trixie..." Twilight yawned.

"Goodnight, my love..." Trixie cooed as she snuggled up against Twilight. This was nice...No Macintosh and his big hooves getting in her way of being snuggly with Twilight. None of that farm smell either. Would it kill him to bathe before coming to bed? No, it was just her laying there against Twilights side, listening to the soft sound of her breathing...and Trixie not being the least bit sleepy. She was a little too giddy about having Twilight all to herself for a night, that she almost kicked and squealed in delight. The fear of being banished to the sofa kept her quite silent and still.

"Trixie..."

"Yes?"

"Your tail is swishing."

...

Dawn was approaching. Luna had something of a natural clock for these things. She had no idea how long she and Fluttershy had spent talking...well, Luna doing most of the talking, but at some point she had eventually found her way to bed. She yawned and stretched her midnight blue wings, pondering going out to see Celestia raise the sun before going back to bed...when she had a realization...She was not in her room, and this was not her bed. For one, her bed was circular...this was a common square bed. Secondly...That was definitely Fluttershy sleeping soundly beside her.

Luna tapped her hooves together, feeling a bit awkward.

"...What...happened last night?"

...

Rarity had given up on laying in wait for Trixie, and eventually returned home to muse and grumble in a ladylike fashion. She had stayed up late browsing her paperback copy of 'The Tack Shed Diaries', nibbling some bonbons. Come morning, she was still turning things over in her head, while pretending to contemplate a new dress design. Her attention to her scheming was diverted by Twilight, whom had appeared with a few articles that were in need of some repair.

"I'm sorry for bringing you these. I'm just such a klutz when it comes to sewing." Twilight confessed as Rarity sorted through the old quilts and whatnot, giving varying expressions of 'you keep this in your home'.

"Oh, don't be daft, darling. It's my pleasure to assist you. Besides, it's good to work on something that's not a dress...What is this?" Rarity pulled out a star-studded cape. A very shabby cape at that.

"Oh, that...t-that's the cape you made me for that dress mishap. Remember?" Twilight smiled through her teeth, adding a nervous laugh. "That was a crazy time, huh?"

"Hmmm...I remember all my works, even the bad one's, and this one, Darling, is definitely not one of mine...This is Trixie's cape!" Rarity recalled that pattern, and that gem that made up the clasp.

"W-What? No! No no no. No. No. Definitely not. No it's not." Twilight stated. Rarity glared. "It's not."

"You are a terrible liar, Twilight Sparkle." Rarity leaned in close to Twilight. "You're not hiding something...Scandalous, are you?"

"Have you been reading those books of yours again?" Twilight tried to brush it off with a small laugh, but Rarity was having none of it.

"Yes, but that's beside the point. You have been acting very peculiarly of late, Twilight. Is there something you want to tell me?"

Twilight swallowed. She had practiced tell everyone about the arrangement with Trixie and Macintosh...but the mere thought made Twilight feel sick, and her mind brought about horrible thoughts of everypony looking down on her, judging her.

"Nothing at all!" Twilight chirped, starting to back up for the door. "Just let me know when you finish them! Bye!" And with that, Twilight zipped out.

Rarity wrinkled her nose and sat the materials she'd been given aside. "...You're only fooling yourself, dear Twilight. But fear not, soon I'll have this affair blown open, and though it may sting, I swear I will cure you of your addiction to love!"

...

"Apples! Come get yet apples! Farm fresh, and juicy sweet!" Applejack called out in a singsong voice as she and Macintosh tended to the apple stand in the center of town. "Worm and pesticide free! I swears! Ah, howdy there, Twilight!" The orange Earth Pony called out to her friend, she was trotting with quite a bit of stride in her step through town.

"Ah, hey there, Applejack." Twilight slowed her trot as she came up on the stand. "Hey Mac."

"Howdy." Came a reply from behind the stand, the only evidence of Macintosh being present being his flank and tale peaking out while he busied himself with preparing baskets.

"So whatcha doin' at market this mornin', Twi?" Applejack asked, batting her eyes. "In the market to display some generosity to your good old buddy Applejack and buy a bushel?"

"Oh, thanks but...EEP!" Twilight nearly choked as down the street, she spied Trixie at a vender, buying some roasted pinecones. "Hey, AJ, I'll be right back. Do you need help, Mac?"

"Nope."

"Are you SURE?"

"Eeyup."

"You sure, bro, you been back there an awful long while. You ain't just lettin' yer sis do all the work, now is ya?" Applejack turned to regard Macintosh's flank, giving Twilight time to slip off and get to Trixie.

...

"What are you doing out here?" Twilight squeaked. Trixie just stared at her with a confused, yet mildly amused glance, biting off a petal of her pine cone.

"...I got snackish, and felt like stretching my legs."

"But everyone will see you!"

"Everyone knows me by my cape and hat. I am wearing neither. My cutie mark isn't exactly one-of-a-kind..."

"That's besides the point!" Twilight kept glancing around in case Rarity, or Rainbow Dash came their way.

"Look...Twilight, we're going to have to let the cat out of the bag sooner or later...Oh, look, there's Macintosh and Applesmack...Why don't we go over there, and together we can-OOF!" A sudden flurry of dark orange and purple came out of nowhere, tackling Trixie on the back of the head.

"I gotcha, you home wrecker!" Scootaloo cried out as she clung onto the Pegasus's mane.

"Get off me, you little squirt!" Trixie shrieked, trying to shake and buck the filly off her head.

"Never! Feel the wrath of the Crusaders!" Scootaloo tugged on Trixie's mane, causing her to rear back and knock over a vendor's displayed goods. Twilight frantically skirted around Trixie trying to get a hold on the little filly with her magic, but Trixie's jerking around was not doing her any favors.

"What in Tar-" Applejack was just coming over to see what all the fuss was about...when Trixie outright plowed into her, toppling all three into a pile.

Scootaloo lifted into the air, and was brought face to face with a very cross Twilight.

"Uh...Hi..." Scootaloo smiled sheepishly.

"...Twilight..." Applejack's voice called from underneath Trixie, whom at the moment was down for the down.

"...Er...Sis?" Macintosh peered down at his sister beside Twilight. "...About that..."

Twilight could only give a nervous smile.

Chapter 13

Luna stared with a mortified expression at the sleeping Pegasus nestled into the bed beside her. More so for herself, demanding to know whether she had in some way taken advantage of the meek and mild pony. Certainly, Luna knew that she could sometimes be slyly aggressive if there was something, or someone, she wanted...But this was Fluttershy, sweet, innocent Fluttershy! The most mild mannered of the Elements. To have done such a thing was like putting pink drapes in the throne room. Heresy!

Luna couldn't recall much of last night. She didn't even recall how she even got into bed with Fluttershy. But all possibilities came back to her worse and worse...

"G-Good morning, your majesty." A soft voice greeted Luna from the pillow beside her. Fluttershy was sitting up, yawning. "Did you sleep well?"

"Oh I'm so sorry, Fluttershy!" Luna all but threw herself onto the yellow Pegasus, whom gave a soft squeak, "I don't know what came over me! These past few weeks have just had me so mixed up!"

"P-princess?" Fluttershy wiggled in Luna's grasp.

"I promise to take full responsibility!" Luna cried into Fluttershy's chest.

"What are you talking about?" Fluttershy asked.

Luna blinked, and withdrew a little. "...We...Didn't do anything...scandalous last night, did we?"

Fluttershy turned a bright crimson along her cheeks, glancing away, to avoid Luna's gaze, mumbling something under her breath. It all but confirmed it for Luna, whom scurried under the quilt to hide from the world. "Ooooh, I'm such a mess! I'm a terrible princess!"

"U-uh, no, no you're not!" Fluttershy stared at the lump under her quilt. "I'm sorry, I-I didn't speak clearly...We didn't..."

The lump stopped shaking with sobs. "...We Didn't...?"

"N-no, you...fell asleep after telling me about how...Equestria used to be, and, my bird friends brought you inside, and...well, I..." Fluttershy felt her cheeks grow even more hot. "...I said that it's a little early, but...w-we could, if you wanted to...I mean..."

Now it was Luna's turn to blush, peeking out from underneath the blanket. "F-Fluttershy...?"

"I-I mean, it's alright if you don't want to either, I understand. I'm...not all that desirable..." Fluttershy murmured.

"Fluttershy..." Luna felt a soft smile cross her lips, eyes shimmering a light blue as she gazed up at the Pegasus. "...Come here."

Fluttershy blinked as she looked at the open blanket, open wide for her to enter. Curiosity eventually overrode her naturally cautious and shy nature, slowly crawling underneath to join Luna beneath the bed sheets.

...

Meanwhile, on the other side of Ponyville...

...

The three had been marched to the farm following the incident in the market by Applejack, minus Scootaloo who had been given a very stern talking to and shuffled off on her way with her tail between her legs.

There really wasn't a whole lot that Applejack could say at the moment, and that was very rare. Her face was scrunched up in an expression of deep contemplation, a hoof pressed firmly against her forehead. She wasn't angry. No, this wasn't something she had any reason to be angry about

Eventually, she found the ability to speak again, opening a single eye to look to the three ponies who were a mixed salad of bored apathy, timid confession, and outright awkwardness.

"Really?" She asked. A simple question.

Twilight Sparkle's nervous smile didn't falter much, as she stood there, kicking a hoof into the dirt.

"All that nonsense and drama and such, and you three are off gallopin' and carryin' on hoof in hoof?" Applejack asked some more.

Trixie was more concerned with plucking off bits of her roasted pinecone, crunching them noisily, wondering when Applejack was going to get to the chastising, and scolding, and some diatribe how it was possibly 'just not right'. When there came a pause, Trixie assumed that the orange workhorse was actually waiting for an answer.

"...Well, yes, in a recent development. " Trixie said, clearing her throat some. "An understanding was reached, and agreed upon."

Twilight lowered her head some. "...You see, I love your brother, Applejack...I do. He's a wonderful pony and he's made me very happy. But...I also have these...very strong feelings for Trixie..."

"Twilight-" Applejack started, but Twilight just kept going on.

"And then, Macintosh talked with Trixie and they both decided that they were willing to s..s..share." Twilight blushed.

"Twi..." Applejack tried again to get a word in edgewise.

"And we were just really unsure what everypony would think. I'm not really all that knowledgeable about what is considered Taboo in Equestria, and...I mean, seeing two mares together isn't uncommon, and two stallions together is becoming a little more apparent, but what if we're crossing some sort of invisible social line? I don't know where this line is, I'm not that social!"

"Deep breaths, love." Trixie put a hoof over her shoulder reassuring while Twilight began to gasp for breath, Macintosh offering her a bag with which to hyperventilate into, which she of course did.

"Y'all know I ain't got no problem with this, right?" Applejack finally got out while Twilight inflated and deflated the bag. All three looked up at her in surprise.

"Truly?" Trixie asked.

"No kiddin'?" Mac asked.

"Mmm murr?" Twilight spoke into the bag.

"Shucks, folks, Ah ain't got no problem with this. It's kinda cute. T'aint no concerns of mine whom y'all share a bunk with at the end o' the day. I just don't want no one to get hurt, ya know?" Applejack finally let herself smile, giving Macintosh a hoof in the shoulder.

Twilight finally calmed herself, lowering the bag. "Thanks, AJ...I guess we probably might have given someponys the wrong idea if we tried to keep it a secret."

"Does this mean I don't have to crawl in through the window anymore?" Trixie asked. Applejack was suddenly in her face, giving her a fairly hard scowl.

"As fer you...I'm gonna tell you what I told Twilight...See them?" Applejack nodded to Twilight and Macintosh. "That's my brother, and mah best bud. Two of some of the most important folk in my life. Do them wrong and I will have that mane o' yours on my wall, savvy?"

"Perfectly, and eloquently put, Ms. Applejack." Trixie said, undaunted.

"Good." A smirk crossed Applejacks face, as she spat into her hoof and offered it to Trixie. "Welcome to the herd, sister."

Trixie recoiled some with a look of disgust at the obscene gesture, but a look to Mac and Twilight saw them silently urging her to comply. She huffed a bit, and then drew back, holding up a hoof.

"Snnnnrrrrrrkkkkkkkkkkkk...Ptooe!" The thick, green mass splattered onto her hoof, and then knocked it against Applejacks waiting hoof. The resounding squish caused a wince all around. "...It's good to be welcome...sister."

...

Rarity had purpose in her trot. A quest, she would dare say. All things had finally come full circle and she was ready to implement her plan. Now, she needed Macintosh, and to lure him, while Twilight and Trixie were absent from the library, to where even now an impromptu party was going to be held. She had left the details to Pinky Pie, who did not need much in the way of coaxing to bust out the party planner and boxes of party favors, which she seemed to always keep within hooves reach. Then, they would all lie in wait, for when Twilight and her mischievous filly-fooler would return after dark, no doubt. Like a surprise party, except in the end, the surprise would be Twilight side by side with Trixie, for Macintosh to see.

Rarity didn't want to do this. It meant putting Twilight in a very painful place, and possibly ruining her friendship with her forever. But, she would not attest nor approve of her friends, any of them, to gallivant as she was, and sleeping around behind a perfectly respectable pony's back. It was for her own good, and Rarity was prepared to shoulder the blame. It was because of her that this whole dating and relationship nonsense had gotten put in her head.

...

Applejack was putting away the cart she had hauled back from the market when she saw Rarity marching down the dirt road in her general direction. She was casting her gaze to and fro, looking for something, making Applejack scratch her head with curiosity.

"Whatcha need' there, Rarity?" Applejack called out to her as she trotted out to greet her. Rarity recoiled in surprise at Applejack's being in residence.

"Applejack! H-how are you? I thought you were still at market!" Rarity gushed. Her presence complicated things greatly. She would surely want to be in on any party going on, like any civilized pony would, but the revealing of the plot behind all their backs would certainly lead to dire consequences.

"Well, I WAS, until Scootaloo decided to make a nuisance o' herself and made a bad showin' and whatnot. So, anyhow, what brings you around my neck o' the woods?" Applejack asked, re-stating her earlier inquiry.

"Ah, yes, well. Applejack. Is...your brother available?" Rarity asked, her nervous smile betraying some sort of scheming.

"O' course he ain't, silly filly, he's datin' Twilight, remember?" Applejack stated in an obviously joking manner. "Nah, he left with Twilight some time ago. Probably made it back to the Library by now, to do...y'know whatever it is they do when they's alone, which I try very hard not to execute heavy thought towards."

Rarity felt a sharp cold chill run through her. She thought she had more time, and Twilight already being with Macintosh jeopardized everything, and they were just about to walk in on...Oh dear...

"Oh...Well, very considerate of you, so...then...I think I best get going, I'll just...make plans to speak with him later..." Rarity turned to leave, however Applejack's hoof firmly planted on her perfectly manicured tail caused her to become rather well acquainted with the ground.

"Hold on there, filly. Why don't you just park it there and tell me what this is all 'bout." Applejack said.

"No, really, I should REALLY be going!" Rarity insisted, pleading with her eyes.

"Ah, ya just got here." Applejack then sat on Rarity's tail. "Now, out of with it. Granny has an apple pie on the window, and you look like you just got yer hair done. Let's try and keep 'em where they is, alrighty?"

Rarity gasped. "You wouldn't!"

The grin Applejack was wearing her offered no succor. Rarity weighed the pros and cons of just blurting it all out to Applejack, and protecting two hours of careful handiwork. Finally, she gave in...

"Very well...Applejack...I did not want to be the one to have to deliver this revelation...Now, please, in light of it, I take full blame, and we should think none the worse of dear Twilight..."

"Will you just reach yer point?" Applejack asked.

"Twilight has been...Seeing Trixie behind Macintosh's back!" Rarity squeaked, bracing herself for the ascendance of Appledoom. Instead, she heard laughter. Applejack rolled off of Rarity's tail, stomping a hoof, having just a wonderful laugh.

"Is that it? That's what's gotcha all tangled and flustered?" Applejack chuckled.

"Applejack, I am shocked! This is no laughing matter! Your brother is being played for a fool!" Rarity stammered, rather awestruck at this unprecedented response.

"Oh, Big Macs a fool alright, but you got things a might out of focus, Rarity."

...

"Is that even legal?" Rarity asked, slightly dumbfounded, after Applejack gave her the account of earlier.

"Ya ever seen the princess tell Twilight no before?" Applejack trotted over to the wagon and began fishing around, pulling up a large ceramic jug. "After all that, ah could use a drink..."

"Touché." Rarity murmured. "So this whole time, all this drama, all this suspense..."

"T'weren't worth up to nuthin. Yup." Applejack offered the cider jug to Rarity after swallowing a mouthful. "A fine mess, huh?"

Rarity sighed and took a deep swig From the jug. So that was how it was. Twilight wasn't fooling around. No. Then again, Rarity figured that she should have known there was something more to it than Twilight being an unfaithful filly. This was Twilight after all. Deception is not her strong point. Now, Rarity just felt foolish and a right jackass for even thinking of the whole bit. "A fine mess, indeed."

And so the two sat together and watched the sun begin to set, passing the jug back and forth.

"Haveta admit."

"Hmm?"

"Was a lot more interestin' than them trashy clop novels you read."

"For once...I have to agree."

"So what was it you was gonna tell Mac?"

"Oh road apples..."

...

The loving trio were rounding the bend towards Twilights treehouse. Twilight was looking forward to a pleasant evening of quiet research, after a tasty supper. Trixie was looking forward to keeping Twilight from researching in any way by utilizing her great and powerful cute. And Macintosh was looking forward to slapping some grub on the stove and then taking a long soak.

"I'm curious." Trixie suddenly said.

"About what?" Twilight asked.

"If I am your mare friend, and Macintosh is your colt friend, in a conjoined relationship, does that make Macintosh my colt friend as well?"

The three paused and regarded each other.

"I reckon so, I suppose." Macintosh mused, pondering that himself.

"Why do you ask, Trixie? Are you being taken in by his charm as well?" Twilight giggled, leaning up against Trixie in a teasing manner.

Trixie blushed and shook her mane, scrunching up. "No, I mean...I...Well, maybe I want to sleep in the middle spot sometimes!"

Macintosh and Twilight exchanged glances and smiles, and then continued on.

"Don't you walk away from me!" Trixie huffed and trotted after them.

...

"Ugh, it's pitch dark in here...Spike!" Twilight called, her horn sparking into a glow to get her lamps going. The light had barely illuminated her foyer when there was a sudden series of pops and a loud chorus of "SURPRISE" as the room was suddenly filled with ponies. Twilight shrieked and leapt onto Macintosh, clinging tightly to his thick neck.

"Hey! You guys are early! Rarity just left to go get Macintosh! But now you're here, so the party can start! Yay!" Pinkie Pie burst forth from the crowd and onto Macintosh as well. "Hi!"

"Howdy. Well, I sure weren't expectin' no shindig tonight..." Macintosh mused as he trotted in, Twilight still frozen around his neck. "What's the occasion?"

"You guys are silly! Rarity said that Twilight was up to something really special and needed all of us here together! At first I was like, oh wow, Twilights' pregnant! But now I see it's even better!"

"Better...?" Trixie managed, a little unnerved being around this many ponies when not on a stage. With lights that blotted out most of them.

"Of course, Trixie Mixie! Twilight has TWO KISSIE FACES!" Pinkie Pie cheered, the gathered throng cheering with her.

"...I will pay you never to call me that again..." Trixie scowled.

"W-wait...You know?" Twilight felt a cold panic run through her, tightening her hold around Macintosh's neck. "How?"

"Rarity told me, and then I told Lyra, and Lyra told Bon Bon, and then Bon Bon told Vinyl, and then Vinyl told...Everyone, I guess!" Pinkie Pie thought back to who said what to whom. "But she didn't make me Pinkie Pie swear to secrecy, so I thought, what the hay, this is great news!"

Twilight felt like she was about to faint...

...

And so it was that the three did not get the quiet evening they had wanted. Rarity and Applejack eventually joined them later on, to which Rarity apologized and confessed to how foolish she had been behaving. Twilight had NOT in fact drunk from the clichéd fountain of the Love Triangle at all. Three ponies had simply made the decision, that love could be shared between friends. Twilight of course could not bring herself to have any ill feelings toward her best friend, who only earlier that day, had been plotting to bring about hers and Macintosh's breakup.

And then all the ponies partied, and partied hard, in the name of the oddest couple in all of Ponyville.

...

When the last quest was let out and the last final balloon put away, Twilight Sparkle let out a weary sigh of relief that the night was finally coming to an end. As she helped Pinkie Pie put away her party favors and supplies, into a box that seemed impossibly larger on the inside than it was on the outside, she felt...lighter.

"So...Pinkie, what do you think?"

"Hmm?" Pinkie Pie looked up from the box, tilting her head curiously.

"About this. You know..." Twilight nodded her head toward Mac and Trixie, who were chatting with Rainbow Dash and Rarity.

"They make you happy, don't they?" Pinkie asked in return.

"Well, yeah. They do." Twilight felt herself smile. "It feels...right."

Pinkie Pie saddled up beside her and gave her a friendly lean on. "I'm jealous. But in a good way."

"I thought you had Brian." Twilight chuckled some, Pinkie Pie giggling a bit.

"That's just me being silly. Brian's just a broom." There was a rare melancholy mixed into Pinkie Pie's usual chirpiness. "You think there's somepony out there for a pony like me?"

"I think there's someone out there for everypony, Pinkie Pie. Even one as random as you" Twilight gave her friend a reassuring hug. Pinkie Pie smiled, but her eyes were watering like she was about to cry.

"T-thanks Twi." Was all she said before she returned to full-on Pinkie mode and finished putting her party gear away, hopping along as though the matter hadn't even come up.

...

"Alright, now y'all play nice." Applejack bade them farewell as she and the others took their leave, Pinkie Pie balancing the box containing all of her party equipment on her back like it was just a sack of potatoes. "Don't do nuthin' ah wouldn't do now."

"Darling, we have probably done things your mind probably can't even comprehend, right, lover boy?" Trixie nudged Mac, who let out a nervous laugh. Applejack paused, shuddered and twitched, then proceeded on without another word.

"Well, then...I'm plumb tuckered out, girls." Mac said with a loud yawn. "I think I'm gonna turn in."

"Hmmm...Let me freshen up, and I'll be right there...Twilight?" Trixie glanced over her shoulder to Twilight, who was readying a quill. "Working this late?"

"Oh, you two go on. I just have to finish something real quick. I won't be long."

Trixie smiled and nodded, before joining Macintosh into the bedroom.

Twilight tapped the feather of the quill against her nose, deep in thought, and then began to write...

...

Dear Princess Celestia...

Years ago, when I was still a foal, you once told me that as students, we are not unlike those who go off into the woods, and sometimes find ourselves surrounded by things we do not recognize. When I started this project, I didn't know exactly where I would wind up, but I went anyway. My search into the province of romance didn't turn out to be an intellectual endeavor at all...However, I feel I have learned more about myself, and of those whose company I keep, than I ever have. During this period, I fell in love with my greatest rival, and was shown love by somepony I never expected.

At one point, I feared it would all come toppled down on top of me, but in the end, I discovered that Love just isn't that simple. Some Ponies will try to

apply rules to love, and they are welcome to. But for now, I'm more than content to simply be with the ones I call my lovers, my friends. I look forward to learning even greater things about friendship, about love, about life, in the days to come.

Your ever faithful student, Twilight Sparkle.

...

When she was finished reading, Celestia smiled to herself. With her magic, she slipped the letter onto a blank page in a large tome on her desk, a collection of all of Twilight's research. It had always been her intent to save these, not just for herself, but for other generations of apprentices to come. Those who are adept to learn and study, are also adept to shy away from the simple pleasures of life...Friendship, love, amongst them.

Once more, Twilight Sparkle had exceeded her expectations. She had managed to avoid the painful lesson of heartbreak, and find herself in a place with those who love her. For that, Celestia could not have been more pleased.

In Macintosh, Celestia saw stability, comfort, and simplicity. A dedicated stallion. Her connection to the simple earth ponies of Equestria. As well as a voice of common sense. Sometimes Twilight lacked that when under pressure. Macintosh could be that calm voice in times of trouble.

In Trixie, Celestia saw as an inspiration for adventure. To pull away from her books and get out into the world. To see and experience without need or cause. To laugh, to see, to feel. To have one like herself close. A colleague.

And together...These eight amazing ponies, Celestia agreed, as she stirred her tea, would do great things in the days to come.

The End

From the author...

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank each and every one of you who took the time to read this fan fiction. The comments and suggestions I've gotten have been a real driving force for this work, and I probably would have never gotten past chapter 5 alone if it wasn't for the support of my bronies.

Now, I know some of you are looking at it and thinking that I've left some loose ends, and I have. For the story bits that went unwritten, I've added them to my list of projects I want to pursue as their own full stories later on.

And now...enjoy some random bits.

-Doctor Scraps

...

Twilight wore an expression of uncertainty as she tested the strength of the rope that bound her hooves to the table onto which she was strapped too.

"Um, Trixie, I know I said I would help you with your new trick, but...is this really necessary?"

Trixie paused in her referencing of a book entitled 'The Escape Artist in All of Us-A How to Guide', considering. "Well, to be frankly honest, this isn't the setup I wanted to try at all. I must have been so tickled that you actually allowed me to tie you up, that I got carried away."

"Oh, well, that's a relief. So...untie me and we can do it properly?"

And then Big Mac appeared...

"Well, it looks like you ladies are having fun."

"Exceptionally, dear." Trixie laughed. "Care to join us?"

"Don't mind if I do."

Twilight's eyes grew large as Mac and Trixie encroached upon her. "Uh, guys? Really? Wait, wait!"

...

Rainbow Dash suddenly came into view, sitting beside the field reserved for the Wonderbolts training facility. She did not look amused.

"So what the hay, Mr. Big Shot Author?" Rainbow said, "You tease me with my own little story arc and it doesn't even come up again! What kind of hack are you? I have fans, you know. I deserve a lot more respect than I've been given in this story."

That was when a bit of text fell upon her head.

"Oof!" went Rainbow Dash, rubbing the sore spot on her as she looked upon the bit of text.

It read, in big loud letters,

"COMING SOON, RAINBOW DASH STARRING IN "SOARIN' HIGH AND FALLIN' FAST!"

"Well...Alright you win this time Mr. Author, sir. I'll call off my loyal legionaries. For now."

...

"So if I read this story right, Twilight Sparkle is bisexual...There was evidence that Rainbow Dash is straight...And Fluttershy is the lesbian?" Lyra mused as they sat together on a bench.

"Seems that way." Bon Bon said.

"Is that even legal?" Lyra asked.

"Lesbian Fluttershy?"

"No, straight Rainbow Dash."