

Vengeance and Fashion

By Tumbleweed



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Chapter 1

"Applejack, hold still!"

"I'm tryin'! But iffin' you keep on pokin' me like that, I'm gonna move."

Rarity gave a dainty "Hmph!" and set about levitating the pin through the fabric, close enough to graze Applejack's orange coat. "Don't get me wrong, darling- I'm thrilled that you've asked me to repair your dress after...*that* evening-"

"Well heck, I ain't never had anythin' so fancypants lookin'."

"I know." Rarity deadpanned. "-but if you don't stop fidgeting, I could slip, and I'm absolutely certain you won't enjoy getting a pin through your cutie mark."

"You threatenin' me?" Applejack said, and turned to glare at Rarity.

"No, I am stating a simple fact. If I were *threatening* you, I'd tell you to hold still or else I would tie you up so tightly you'd hardly be able to blink."

"I'd like to see you try!"

"Don't tempt me." Rarity said, clenching her teeth. She plucked another needle from the pincushion strapped to her front left hoof- but it traveled through the air a little faster than was exactly professional.

"I'll tempt anybody I dang well please!" Applejack said.

"I'm not...interrupting anything, am I?" Both ponies froze as soon as they heard Twilight Sparkle's voice.

"Ah, no." Rarity said. She pulled in a deep breath, and brushed her mane back behind one ear. "I was just *trying* to fix Applejack's dress. Perhaps now that someone else is here to see, she can actually *hold still*."

"Less hawin', more hemmin'."

"Ah, right." Twilight said. "Um. I can come back later, if it's more convenient-"

"No no," Rarity said, and slid another pin into place, "I'm sure we're all busy ponies- no reason I can't chat and sew at the same time."

"Oh sure!" Twilight said, "I just thought I'd stop by. As, uh. I just got a letter from Princess Celestia, and she mentioned some news that I thought you'd find interesting..."

"News," Rarity said, "or gossip?"

"There's a difference?" Applejack turned to peek at the two unicorns.

"Of course!" Rarity said, "one's *far* more entertaining than the other."

"Er, uh. If that's the case, I'm not entirely sure which category it'd fall into..." Twilight bit at her lower lip.

"Maybe we should decide for ourselves once we hear it?" Rarity said, lining up a particularly tricky pin.

"Prince Blueblood is coming to Ponyville."

"OW!"

"Sorry Applejack." both unicorns said in unison.

Chapter 2

One band aid and three cups of tea later, Rarity pulled in a deep breath, "Twilight, if you'd be so kind, could you explain just what's going on?"

"Again?" Applejack asked.

"Again."

"Um. I'm afraid there's not much to say- Princess Celestia mentioned Prince Blueblood would be coming to Ponyville tomorrow-"

"Did she say *why*?" Rarity leaned forward. "You've got to tell me why?"

"Well, uh." Twilight winced, "she didn't say."

"Iffin' he's as bad as y'all are sayin', maybe Princess Celestia's sent 'im ta live out here fer awhile so he can learn 'bout friendship 'n stuff? Like Twilight?" Applejack paused, "not to say yer as bad as Prince Fancypants-"

"Don't say that Applejack!" Rarity said, eyes wide in horror.

Applejack scratched at her head, "Wait, you think Twilight's as bad as-"

"No! The other part!"

"Whut, 'bout Prince Blueblood coming to live in Ponyville?"

"Augh!" Rarity clapped her hooves over her ears. "I can't stand so much as hearing his *name*!"

"Calm down," Twilight said, and patted the other unicorn on the shoulder. "I'm sure it won't be as bad as you think."

"You're right. It'll be worse!" Rarity groaned. She shut her eyes as tight as she could. "If *that pony* comes to Ponyville, he'll want to come to my store. I just know it."

Twilight tried for optimism. "This *is* the most fashionable store in the whole-

"That's not it." Rarity said, flatly.

"So he's comin' for YOU, huh?" Applejack said, "makes sense. Bet he's still sore in the saddle after that talkin-to ya gave him. Had it a long time comin'."

"That's not it either." Rarity shook her head, "Don't you realize? He's *bound* to come here! My dress shop has more mirrors than any other building in town!"

"Ooooooh." Twilight and Applejack said in unison.

Rarity seethed. "I swear, if I see that pony again, I can't be held responsible for what happens next."

"What if ya don't see 'im?" Applejack said, "You could come on over to Apple Buck Acres- there's no way a fancypants fella like him is gonna get within a stone's throw of anyplace where actual *work* is bein' done. And I'm sure we can find, uh...somethin' fun to do while we're out there." Applejack scratched at the back of her neck, "Maybe bring some of them records 'gain?"

Slowly, Rarity opened her eyes "That...just might work. But I still wouldn't want to leave my shop unattended- there's a shipment of wool coming in from Phillydelphia tomorrow, and a few customers will be stopping by to pick up a few alterations..."

"Oh!" Twilight Sparkle perked up, "What if Spike and I watch the store for you? I promise, we won't touch anything- but it's no problem if we sign for deliveries, right?"

"I suppose- but it's only a temporary measure. If...*he* is here longer than a day, what am I supposed to do? As much as I love your company, Applejack, I can't hide myself away in your barn forever."

"You won't have to!" Twilight said, "I'm sure Price Blueblood's just passing through. Princess Celestia would've told me if he were staying any longer than that."

"less she thought it'd be funny if she didn't." Applejack said.

The three ponies stared at each other for a long, long moment. Finally, Twilight Sparkle broke the silence. "So, uh, Rarity- when do you want me to open your store tomorrow?"

Rarity's answer was 'too early.' At least, it was for Twilight Sparkle's tastes. Her typical studies rarely began before 10am if she could help it. As a result, she was still a bit bleary eyed as she trotted up to the place- to say nothing of the zombielike Spike perched upon her back.

"Now darling," Rarity said, "if there's any trouble whatsoever, you'll know where to find me. Just send the word, and I'll be here as fast as I can."

"It's fine, Rarity." Twilight said, "All I have to do is accept a few deliveries and shoo off Prince Blueblood when he gets here. I think we can manage that. Can't we, Spike?"

"Hnhg?" Spike blinked his eyes open- only to get a good look of a wide-eyed Rarity. There were certainly worse things for a dragon like him to wake up to. "Right!" he said, snapping to wakefulness. "I won't let anything bad happen while I'm here!"

"Mmm. Thank you- both of you." Rarity said, "this really was a good idea, Twilight. I've just got to think of it as more of a...vacation than anything. Yes. A single day's vacation. To...a farm. Admittedly, a nice farm, with more than nice company-"

"Just go on, Rarity." Twilight smiled, "Everything's going to be fine."

"Yes, yes. You're right. But be careful, Twilight- you've got my livelihood in your hooves." Rarity said.

"Rarity, if you keep talking, you're never going to leave." Twilight said.

"Yes, yes. Don't remind me. But *do* be careful, will you?"

"Anything for you, Rarity." Spike said, swooning from both the emotion and the lack of sleep.

"Yes, yes. Just remember, whatever you do, don't touch anything that looks important."

"How are we supposed to know what's important?" Spike asked.

"Well, it's *all* important, so just try not to touch anything, hm?" Rarity said. "And again, Twilight- thanks for helping out- the sooner we put this whole ordeal behind us, the better off all of us will be, I'm sure. Ta!" Rarity took one last glance at her boutique, and then set off at a leisurely trot in the general direction of Sweet Apple Acres.

Twilight watched her go, and then walked into the boutique. "Don't worry, Spike. This'll be easy. I've actually been looking forward to this. Just a nice, quiet day- and I can take the opportunity to get caught up on my reading." Twilight shrugged out of her saddlebags, and then levitated out a thick tome. "Just try not to eat any of the bejeweled outfits."

"Twiliiiiight! You know I'd never do that! Rarity worked really hard on all of this! I could never ruin it like that."

"Not if you were reeeeeeeally hungry?"

"Not even then!"

"I'll hold you to that. Especially around lunchtime." Twilight said with a laugh. She propped the first of her books on Rarity's sewing table and opened the tome. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got a dictionary to read."

"You're reading the dictionary?" Spike said.

"Of course! It's the new Mareiam-Webster. I'm really looking forward to seeing what changes they made this year." Twilight stroked the pages with the sort of reverence most reserved for a work of art, or at least a really well-made cupcake.

"Huh." Spike said, and shook his head. "I'll just find someplace to take a nap."

But before Spike could find his favorite pile of pincushions, and before Twilight could do so much as remove her bookmark, someone came busting through the door. Several someones, actually: that cute brown-haired pony with the hourglass cutie mark (whose name Twilight kept forgetting), Roseluck...and a broad-shouldered pegasus pony she didn't recognize.

"Hiiii." Roseluck said, looking both harried and embarrassed. "Sorry to burst in like this, but-" she paused, glancing around. "Where's Rarity?"

"Oh! Rarity had some...business to take care of. I'm just covering for her-hey!" Twilight glared as the doctor toppled a few mannequins and began to rummage through a pile of sewing supplies. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Sorry, it's an emergency." The pegasus said. Somehow, he'd gotten very, very close without Twilight noticing. She blamed the wings. "Fashion emergency." he said. The dazzling smile he offered made it seem a little more believable.

"Um. Hi?" Twilight forced herself not to blush.

"Oh, right! We haven't been introduced. Captain Jack Harness." the pegasus pony said, shaking Twilight's hoof. "And, while I've got the chance, I'd like to say that purple's always been my favorite color..."

"Not now, Jack!" Roseluck said, glaring from across the room.

"You never let me have any fun." Captain Jack Harness said, and gave his wings an indignant flutter.

"Aha, got one!" cried the brown pony. He circled around one of the more ornate looking outfits on display- then yanked the centerpiece gem off. "An octo-faceted carbonate crystal- just what the doctor ordered!"

"Hey, wait!" Twilight said- but before she could protest any further, the odd trio stampeded out of the boutique, leaving a small disaster in their wake.

"Is it just me," Spike said, and rubbed at his eyes, "or was that really weird?"

"Um. I don't know." Twilight said, still bewildered, "maybe crazy ponies come in here all the time-"

"You *do* hang out here a lot." Spike said.

Twilight glared. The little dragon didn't seem to notice. "Anyway, we'd better get all this cleaned up before-"

"Special Delivery!" Ditzzy Doo crashed in, knocking the doorway off its hinges. She tottered from side to side, precariously balancing a massive bundle upon her shoulders. Under other circumstances, Twilight would have been impressed at the feat of strength. As it was, however, the unicorn could do little but toss out the strongest telekinesis spell she could manage.

"Oh, thanks!" Ditzzy Doo said, "I just flew in from Phillydelphia, and boy are my wings tired."

Twilight and Spike stared at the mailpony.

"What, they are! You try carrying a load of compressed wool all that way." Ditzzy shrugged out of her carry-harness, and the package hit the floor with a heavy *THUMP.* "Hey, where's Rarity?"

"She's out." Twilight said.

"Oh, uh. Okay? I guess you guys can sign for this." Ditzzy Doo rummaged a clipboard from her saddlebag. I mean, you're trustworthy, right?"

"Most of the time." Spike said.

"Hey!" Twilight glared at the dragon. "I'm Princess Celestia's favorite student-"

"Exactly!" Spike said, crossing his arms.

"Uh, y'know what? I'll...I'll just leave this here." Ditzzy said, and set the clipboard to the side. "I'll be back later!" and with speed that would do Rainbow Dash proud, the pegasus took off.

"Okay," Spike said, poking the pile of compressed wool with one claw.

"Rarity was expecting this. And I bet she was expecting those other ponies too. So that gets most of her business out of the way. So that means we can go home and go back to sleep, right?"

"Maybe." Twilight Sparkle said. "So long as nobody else shows up."

"Ahem." said Prince Blueblood.

"Agh!" Twilight stumbled a few steps backwards. "Where'd you come from?"

"Canterlot, obviously." Blueblood said, huffing slightly, "would you believe I've been here for a whole fifteen minutes, and nobody's so much as complimented me on my grooming?"

"Well. Uh. It's very nice?" Spike ventured.

"Just...nice?" Prince Blueblood huffed. "That's all you have to say? Hmf. I should have expected as such from such a...provincial locale."

"Well, uh, you get used to it?" Twilight offered, falling back to politeness by reflex. "Really, Ponyville's not that long once you get used to it. You know, I used to live in Canterlot-"

"Did you?" For the first time, Blueblood deigned to look at Twilight Sparkle. "I suppose that explains a lot. I had heard Ponyville had some unicorn as an up and coming designer. It makes sense that you're not *really* from such an insignificant backwater-"

"Oh no, I'm not Rarity-"

"Of course you're not! I *met* a pony named Rarity once- she was *entirely* too gauche. A trollop, even!"

"What's a trollop?" Spike said.

"Not now, Spike." Twilight said, and nudged the little dragon away. "Let me handle this."

"Now there's the sort of take-charge attitude that's made you an up and comer, I'm sure." Blueblood said, taking more than a moment to admire himself in one of the boutique's many mirrors. "Now, I came to Ponyville to enjoy the spa here- but stopping here will be a bonus. I'll expect the suit by this afternoon-"

"The suit?" Twilight said.

"Oh, of course! Something that matches my eyes, I'd say. You know, dashing. Daring. Debonair."

"But I'm not-"

"Used to designing for such a pinnacle of masculine fashionability? I understand completely. Most of my tailors have had such a problem. The *best* of them are able to handle the challenge."

"But I never-"

"-had a customer of my elevated station- not to mention my singularly handsome good looks. I understand. You won't get customers of my caliber out here- of course, you won't get customers of my caliber *anywhere*, but if you were in Canterlot proper, you'd no doubt be accustomed to such a thing. In any case, I've an appointment to have my horn filed- I'll look forward to seeing what you've developed this afternoon. Ta!" and with a final wink to his reflection in the mirror, Prince Blueblood trotted out.

Speechless, Twilight could do little but stare at Blueblood's flanks as the unicorn left. It wasn't for the obvious reason, either.

"Hey!" Spike said, looking up from the Mareiam-Webster dictionary. "Rarity's not a trollop!"

"I know she isn't." Twilight said, shaking her head out of her shock, "But you only heard about what happened at the Grand Galloping Gala- I was *there*. I mean, she was entirely justified in what she did, but I can understand how Prince Blueblood might-"

"He-" Spike frantically leafed through the dictionary, "-besmirched her honor! He's a besmircher!"

"That's not even a word!"

"It should be!" Spike said, "Why, when that stuck up-" Spike looked down, and whipped through the dictionary again, eyes scanning the text, "When that stuck up *ponce* comes back, I'm gonna knock some sense into him-"

"You will not!" Twilight said, glaring, "Like him or not, you can't fight him."

"Sure I can!" Spike said, flexing his arms to little effect. "I mean, sure, I'm small, but I'm still a dragon. I can breathe fire! I can eat gems! Some stuck-up unicorn'll be easy! Even if he's, like...ten times as big as I am."

"More like fifteen."

"Doesn't matter!"

"You're right, it doesn't." Twilight said, and glared. "Because right now, Prince Blueblood thinks *I'm* Rarity."

"He thinks you're a trollop too? I'll have to fight him twice!"

Twilight rubbed her eyes with one hoof. "No, no. He thinks I'm that 'up and coming unicorn designer' from Ponyville."

"So why didn't you tell him you weren't?"

"I tried! Didn't you see? He wasn't listening!" Twilight sighed, and looked to the door, in case somepony else came barging in. "And now he expects a suit."

"That's perfect!" Spike said, "We'll just wait until he comes back, and then I can challenge him to a *duel*."

"No dueling!"

"Okay, so I'll just drop a bucket on his head."

"No buckets!"

"You're right." Spike said, stroking at his chin. "Maybe if I got a pie...you think Sugarcube Corner's open yet?"

"You're not listening!" Twilight said, glaring at the little dragon. "Don't you see? We *can't* be rude to Prince Blueblood- Rarity's depending on us!"

"She is?"

"She is! We're not just taking care of her store, we're taking care of her reputation. And Prince Blueblood won't listen to any of my excuses- I know his type. If he doesn't get what he wants, he'll start badmouthing Rarity's work to everyone in Canterlot."

"But if he didn't even remember Rarity's name..."

"But he'll remember it's a unicorn designer from Ponyville! Not like there's many of them around. Just Rarity. And, uh, me, now."

"Wait. I'm confused." Spike said.

"So am I!" Twilight's voice quavered, if just a little. "But...it's fine. All I've got to do is make a designer outfit for Prince Blueblood by the time he comes back."

"But Twilight, you don't know anything about fashion." Spike said, eyeing her warily. He'd long since learned to recognize that ever-so-slightly mad tone. It usually meant something bad was about to happen.

"I have, uh...a grounding." Twilight said, tilting her chin up a bit. "I *am* from Canterlot, after all."

"And you barely stepped outside of your library for like three years."

"Quiet, Spike." Twilight Sparkle circled around a bare mannequin, already laying out designs in her head. "I still picked up a few ideas, here and there. You just go back to the Library and grab every book on fashion you can carry. Proper research is always the first step to solving any problem."

"Uh. Are you sure that's the best idea?"

"I'll be fine, Spike. After all this, what else could go wrong?"

Chapter 3

Meanwhile, back at Sweet Apple Acres, Applejack did her best to conceal her enthusiasm. She paced about the barn. Not for the first time, she poked her head out the window to confirm that yes, nobody was around. With Big Macintosh off pulling stumps, and Applebloom off with her friends, and Granny Smith napping over in the farmhouse, there'd be nobody around to see her...dance lesson. And, sure enough, Rarity soon came trotting up the gravel road- and bless her hooves, she didn't even seem to mind the dust.

Just in case, Applejack scanned the skies, making sure Rainbow Dash or some other Pegasus pony wasn't playing voyeur. She'd *never* hear the end of it if Rainbow Dash (or Pinkie Pie, or...anypony, really) found out about these dance lessons. Thankfully, the skies were clear, with not a cloud (or a cloud-moving pegasus) in sight. Whew.

"Hey Rarity!" Applejack waved the unicorn over, "thanks for comin' all the way out here."

"I should be the one thanking you, Applejack." Rarity said as she trotted over. "Sure, it might be a mite more...rustic than what I'm used to, but an idyllic country getaway is *just* what I needed. All the way out here, there'll be nobody to bother me. Er, bother us, I mean."

"I just hope ya don't get too bored way out here."

"Oh," Rarity said, and pulled a record out of her saddlebags. "I'm sure we can think of something."

"Right." Twilight thought aloud. She reached forward to poke at the mannequin. "This...shouldn't be hard. I mean, it's just...applied geometry, for the design. And then making the suit's just a matter of structural engineering. Sort of. Oh! I know, I could put a little glamour on the fabric to make people like it better...yes! Perfect plan. Easy." She nodded to herself, confident in her plan of action.

The mannequin, however, remained bare.

"I just need to find the right pattern, that's all." Twilight nodded to herself, and then she glanced over at the various bolts and swatches of fabric beside Rarity's sewing table. Hesitantly, Twilight poked one with a hoof. Polka dots, maybe? Who didn't like polka dots?

"Oh good," said Prince Blueblood. "You're still here."

"Ah!" Twilight said, and spun around. Her horn glowed as she reflexively began a defensive spell, but forced herself to relax once she saw the Prince. The stallion just tossed his mane back, either ignoring or not realizing how close he'd come to being on the receiving end of a Prismatic Spray.

"I would like to make an apology."

"You would?" Twilight said, blinking. She shouldn't have been surprised- the day had already been weird enough. Maybe Prince Blueblood wasn't as bad as everyone said?

"Indeed. I have realized I've made a terrible mistake."

"Oh!" Twilight released a breath she didn't know she'd been holding, "You wouldn't believe how glad I am to hear that. Er, wait- that didn't come out right-"

"Think nothing of it." the Prince said. "The important part is fixing the problem."

"Right!" Twilight said, "we're both rational ponies- once we talk this out, we'll both have a good laugh about it-"

"Yes, yes," Prince Blueblood said, climbing up upon a small round platform. "I'm sure a...seamstress such as yourself will be able to take my measurements in no time at all."

"What." Twilight said.

"Oh, I know, a practiced eye such as yours should be able to discern my measurements at a glance, but I've a preference for a very...snug fit. Not to

mention I believe I've lost a bit of weight recently, but that's neither here nor there."

Twilight twitched, if just a bit. "Uh. Right. Measurements." Thankfully, Rarity had left a measuring tape in plain view on her sewing table. Twilight wrapped one end around her hoof and walked over to Prince Blueblood, looking him over. Simple scientific observation, Twilight decided. That's all it was. The prince stood impassively still as Twilight stretched the measuring tape over his body. Somewhere, a little voice at the back of Twilight's mind noted that there was a certain thrill to be found in touching her hooves against the Prince's soft fur- and the firm musculature beneath. This little voice was soon shouted down by a far more practical one, which reminded Twilight Sparkle she had a job to do. She wracked her mind to remember where Rarity had measured her before: neck, shoulder, foreleg, waist, flank. Twilight marked each observation down on her paper, and finally took a step back.

"This should do it." Twilight said.

Prince Blueblood turned his head and peered at her. "Forgetting something?" he asked.

"I am?"

"You didn't measure my inseam."

Twilight's cheeks went red. "Oh. Um. Right. Ha ha. Silly me." She glanced over her shoulder at the door, then the windows...nobody else in the shop. Nobody walking by or peering in. No witnesses. She crouched down, carefully reaching beneath Prince Blueblood, stretching the tape upwards with one hoof. Just scientific observation, she told herself. And nobody would have to know-

"Cutie Mark Crusader dry-cleaners are go!" three fillies said in unison.

Twilight froze in horror.

Scootaloo, Sweetie Belle, and Applebloom froze in confusion as they saw Twilight reaching beneath Prince Blueblood's undercarriage.

Prince Blueblood just kept his eyes on the mirror in front of him.

"Um. Hi girls?" Twilight said, dropping the measuring tape as she stood straight upright. "I wasn't expecting-"

Scootaloo managed to speak first. "'reLeavingNowBye!" The little pegasus grabbed her two friends and dragged them out the door as fast as she could. Which was considerably fast, given that wings were involved.

"Wait!" Twilight said, desperately rushing to the door, "it's not what it looks like!"

"Don't forget to measure the inseam of my other leg!" Prince Blueblood said, not bothering to look away from his own reflection.

"...it's worse." Twilight's ears drooped.

Elsewhere, Spike shifted his stack of books so he could get a better look at Sugarcube Corner.

"You know," he said to himself, "Twilight didn't tell me *not* to buy a pie..."

Still elsewhere...

"I swear, Applejack, keep up at this rate, and you'll wear me out before lunch!"

"Aaaaw, what's wrong? Can't keep up?"

"I shouldn't *have* to. While I do my best to keep my figure stylishly trim, I'm simply not as...statuesque as you are, Applejack. Besides," Rarity fussed with a lock of her mane, "a proper soiree would've gone at a far...slower pace."

"Proper soiree? We're in a barn, sugarcube."

"Yes, well. You could pretend." She huffed again, but smiled anyway. "In any case, as much as I love giving these dance lessons, I don't suppose I could trouble you for a bit of, ah...refreshment?"

"Well, I ain't sure iffin' this is fittin' for a proper soiree," Applejack managed to add at least three new syllables to the word 'soiree.' Possibly four. "-but it'll sure as heck getcha back on your hooves." Applejack rummaged around in a dark corner of the barn and pulled out a brown jug. The earth pony uncorked it with her teeth and poured herself a hearty (if unladylike) swig.

"Applejack," Rarity said, narrowing her eyes, "...why are there X's on the side?"

"S just the bottle we used. Go on, try it!" Applejack said, and pushed the jug over towards Rarity. The unicorn took a dainty, experimental sniff- and then she gasped.

"There's alcohol in this!" Rarity said.

"Psh. 's just cider."

"It's not even noon yet!"

"Which is why I haven't drug out the whiskey. Ya *do* know I'm named after liquor, right?"

"Ah." Rarity bit at her lower lip for a moment, and then braved a sip of the cider. It was cool, sweet, and remarkably refreshing. "You know, that's not half bad."

"Dang right it ain't! Brewed it meself. Well, with a little help from Big Mac, but that big lug's more good for drinkin' cider than makin' it, iffin' ya ask me."

"How is your brother, anyway? I don't see him in town that often. Are he and the mailpony still...involved?" Rarity said with all the feigned casualness of someone in search of the juiciest gossip.

"I dunno. Ain't like I talk to 'im 'bout that stuff."

"Oh."

"But he's still gettin' up 'fore sunup ta get the mail every morning."

"Ah!"

"Ain't none of my buisness. And ain't none of yours, either." Applejack said, and took the jug back from Rarity as she affixed her with a suspicious look, "Or have you been eyein' up my brother too? Bad enough that Rainbow Dash keeps on talkin'!"

"Oh! Far from it!" Rarity said, patting Applejack on the shoulder. "I'm sure MacIntosh is a lovely colt, but he's simply not my type. Too quiet, you know."

"He ain't that bad. He's just, uh...kinda like Twilight, I guess."

"He's an academic?"

"Aw, hay no. He's just quiet. He'd rather be out workin' the orchard than talkin' ta most folks. Sorta like how Twilight won't leave that library of hers 'til somepony drags 'er out, y'know?"

"Mmm, I see." Rarity sighed, then looked off in the general direction of Ponyville. "I do hope that Twilight's doing well. I'll have to make her something fabulous to thank her. Do you think she'd like a little black dress? Every girl needs a little black dress."

"I don't." Applejack said.

"You'd be surprised." Rarity smiled. "I think you'd look good in one!"

"Applejack!" Applebloom said, crashing through the barn door.

"Applejack!" said Scootaloo, crashing into Applebloom.

"Rarity?" said Sweetie Belle, crashing into Scootaloo.

Not missing a beat, Rarity discreetly pushed the cider jug behind a hay bale. "Girls!" the unicorn said, "What're you doing here? I thought you were going out cutie mark questing?"

"Crusading!" Scootaloo said, and climbed out from under Sweetie Belle.

"Yes, that." Rarity said.

"We were!" Applebloom shook hay dust out of her mane, "but then Sweetie Belle thought we should try being Cutie Mark Crusader dry cleaners, so we went by the boutique, but you weren't there!"

"Well, yes. I am allowed to visit my friend Applejack, aren't I?" Rarity said, "I don't see why you look so traumatized."

"But Twilight was there!" Sweetie Belle said.

"Ah yes, I asked her to watch the shop. I should've told you, but I didn't expect you to drop by-"

"With a *boy*!" Applebloom added on.

"Plenty of colts come by my boutique, Sweetie Belle. You know that."

"But it wasn't anyone I'd seen before! It was some big unicorn with a white coat." The little unicorn said.

"And fancypants hair." Applebloom added on.

"And he and Twilight were *doing stuff*." Scootaloo said.

Rarity's eye twitched. Repeatedly. "What...kind of stuff?" she said, very carefully.

"And just who's been tellin' you 'xactly what stuff is?" Applejack squinted at her little sister.

"Well, uh. Miss Cheerilee brought Fluttershy into school one day for a biology lesson..." Scootaloo began.

"reLeavingNowBye!" Applebloom and Sweetie Belle said in unison. They each grabbed hold of one of Scootaloo's legs, and took off with all the speed they could muster.

"Y'know," Applejack watched the dust trail recede into the distance, "sometimes I wish I were an only child."

"Did you...listen to them, Applejack?" Rarity said, pulling the cider jug out of its hiding place.

"Li'l bit. Half the time they talk so fast I can only catch every other word."

"They said...Twilight is doing *stuff*." Rarity took a less-than-ladylike gulp of the cider. And another. And another after that.

"They never said what stuff is."

"I think we both know what stuff is!"

"We do?"

"Yes! And who the certain unicorn is, too!" Rarity huffed.

"Oh, ya mean Price Blue-"

"DO NOT SAY HIS NAME." Rarity grabbed Applejack by the shoulders and shook her. Hard.

"-er, Whassisface?" Applejack said as soon as her eyes stopped spinning.

"Yes!" Rarity said. Her mad strength slipped away as she fell melodramatically back. "It all makes sense now! Twilight did all this on purpose! She probably invited him to Ponyville herself!"

"Why would she do that?"

"So she can seduce him!"

"What." Applejack deadpanned.

"Seduce him! With her feminine wiles!"

"I don't think Twilight's got any a' those."

"Oh, she does. I assure you. They're just not as obviously fabulous as mine."

"You've got feminine wiles?" Applejack said.

Rarity just gave her a Look.

"UH." Applejack said, "I mean...you've got...very nice ones?"

"Ah, thank you, Applejack." Rarity said, "But as I was saying, Twilight's got her own tricks- they're just more...underhooved than mine. All she has to do is play up the blushing bookworm, and then he'll just swoop in, and..."

"And what?"

"Then they're doing *stuff*. In *my* store! Probably even on my sewing table."

"So what if they are? Ya hate the jerk's guts anyway."

"IT IS A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE."

"Iffin' you say so."

"I do." Rarity said, and she took another pull from the cider jug. "Now, the proper course of action is obvious."

"Yeah, you're right." Applejack nodded, "we just need to sit tight, mebbe crack open 'nother jug a' cider-"

"-and then we're going back to Ponyville!" Rarity shattered the now-empty jug upon the ground. "And Celestia help anyone who gets in our way."

Chapter 4

"Finished!" Twilight said.

"Um." Spike looked at the unicorn's handiwork. "...is it supposed to be glowing?"

"Oh yes. That's just the radium powder."

"Is that safe?"

"Of course!" Twilight nodded, "So long as Prince Blueblood doesn't wear it more than once a week. Prolonged exposure might have, er...side effects."

"I don't think that's going to be a problem." Spike said. Shiny, sparkly objects usually triggered his voracious draconian appetite, but the...thing Twilight made him lose his appetite, if anything.

"That's an...interesting color you picked, Twilight." Spike said.

"It's puce!"

"That's a color?"

"Mmmhmm. The Guide to Design says to be bold in your color choices. So I went ahead and picked a color I'd *never* seen Rarity use before. Isn't it great? Really, this designing business is a lot easier than I thought it would be. I mean, I'll never be as good as Rarity, sure. But I'm still proud of what I did. Whaddya think, Spike?"

"I, uh. I've never seen anything like it."

"Oh, thanks Spike!" she nodded, "We're even ahead of schedule! This will give us plenty of time to clean up, and take all these books back to the library, and then we can eat that pie you hid behind the mirror over there."

"How'd you know?" Spike gaped.

"I can still smell it, Spike. It's been making me hungry. But I appreciate you getting me a snack while I've been working. Because I *know* you're not going to try anything silly like throwing pies at certain Princes." Twilight Sparkle loomed over her familiar/assistant/little brother. "Right?"

"Uh, right!" Spike said.

"Great!" Twilight beamed. "Now, just put on those lead-lined gloves, and you can-"

"You've got to help me!" Prince Blueblood crashed through the door, and slammed it shut behind him.

"Oh! You're early!" Twilight said, "That's okay, your suit's done, and-"

"Forget the suit!" Blueblood said, shaking with panic and fear, "You've got to hide me!"

"Hide you?" Spike said.

"Yes, hide me! Hide me from...from...*her*." Blueblood said. He risked a peek out one of the windows, and immediately shrank back. He crawled across the floor in a very un-royal manner, then reached up to pull Twilight down to his level. "It's...that pony. The trollop."

Spike gritted his teeth.

Twilight tried a conciliatory smile. "Oh, she's not a-"

"You're right, she's worse!" Prince Blueblood said. "She's a harridan! A shrew! A veritable gorgon!"

"I'm gonna look up all of that later, but I'm not gonna let you say such mean things about Miss Rarity anymore!" Spike lunged for Prince Blueblood, baring his fangs- only to come to an abrupt stop in mid-air.

"That's enough!" Twilight said, careful not to break her telekinetic hold on Spike. "Spike, I'm putting you in Time Out."

"But Twiiiiiiiiiiight!" But before Spike could protest further, he found himself deposited unceremoniously into a corner. He crossed his arms and sulked.

"Oh, thank you!" Prince Blueblood said, sighing in relief, "that's...a dragon, isn't it? It must have come from the Everfree forest. Beastly place, I understand."

"And you!" Twilight said, glaring at the Prince. "I've tried to be polite, but you're making it very, very hard!" she pushed herself back to her hooves. Prince Blueblood kept groveling on the floor- though whether from the implied wrath of one unicorn, or the very real wrath of another. "For one-stop acting all stuck up like you're better than everypony! Because you know what? I'm from Canterlot too! My name is Twilight Sparkle-"

"Who?" Prince Blueblood asked, prying one eye open.

"AGH." Twilight fumed, "I'm Princess Celestia's *favorite student!* Which is a title I've *earned*, which is more than I can say for you! You can't just expect people to fall over themselves for you when you do nothing but treat them like dirt!"

"But I-"

"No buts!" Twilight grabbed hold of the prince and hauled him up to his hooves- all the better so she could glare at him, close enough to press her nose to his. "Now! I'm tired of you talking about my friend Rarity like that! She is one of the nicest, friendliest, most generous ponies I've ever met! And when she comes back, you're going to-"

"I KNEW IT!" Rarity, wild-eyed, crashed through the door (which, by this point, was badly in need of new hinges). "Look at you, Twilight! I leave you alone for half a day, and you're already horn to horn with the likes of *him*."

"Horn to- oh!" Twilight said, shoving herself away from Prince Blueblood. She gave a wan grin. "Heh, I guess that looks kinda bad, doesn't it? Not as bad as it could be-"

"Oh, I know all about how bad it *did* get. Sweetie Belle told me all about how she caught you and the Prince *en flagrante delicto*."

"In a flamingo deli?" Spike scratched his head, "...where'd that dictionary go?"

"Don't look that up Spike." Twilight said.

"In the common parlance-" Rarity didn't take her eyes off of Twilight. "It means they were doing...*stuff*."

"What kinda stuff?" Spike tilted his head to the side, confused.

"Ask Fluttershy when you're older." Rarity said.

Twilight gasped, and blushed hotly. "Rarity, no! That's not what happened at all! This has all been one big misunderstanding-"

"Er. Might I go now?" Prince Blueblood said.

"NO." Twilight and Rarity said in unison- loud enough to make the royal unicorn cringe.

"Now," Twilight said, "Rarity, I think you calm down and let me explain-"

"Explain how this was all your plot? How you invited *that pony* here- to Ponyville, to my store, so you could seduce him?"

Twilight squinted at Rarity. "Seduce him." she said.

"With your feminine wiles!"

"But I don't have any of those!"

"Obviously." Prince Blueblood said, sotto voice.

Twilight spun on him, snorting steam. "What's that supposed to mean!"

"You know," Spike nudged the big unicorn, "I was planning on throwing a pie at you, but I think this is gonna be a lot more fun to watch."

"...it's not too late for the pie, is it?" Blueblood said, very carefully.

"It serves you right, Twilight." Rarity leaned in to poke her friend in the chest. "But the only way to learn some things is to find out for yourself." she narrowed her eyes, "you can even tell Princess Celestia about it in a letter."

Twilight's nostrils twitched at a rather familiar scent. "Rarity, have you been drinking?"

"A little." Rarity said, and drew in a steadying breath.

"It's not even lunch yet!"

"Which is why it was just cider." Rarity noted.

"That's just what Applejack would-...where *is* Applejack, anyway?" Twilight said.

"Oh, she couldn't make it all the way to Ponyville." Rarity's eyes gleamed with mad pride, "she's a bit...tied up at the moment, you understand."

"NOT ANYMORE I AIN'T!" Applejack barreled through the doorway- and into Rarity. The two tumbled over and over each other, until Applejack's brawn proved more than Rarity's delicate frame could handle. "Ha!" Applejack said, pinning Rarity to the floor. "That was a dern fine lasso ya made me chew through, Rarity. But I ain't gonna letcha come down here n' make a dern fool of yerself."

"Ha!" Rarity cackled, "You're too late!"

"I find myself perplexed." Prince Blueblood said. "Who's the pony in the peasant hat?"

"Shhh!" Spike said through a mouthful of popcorn. "No talking, just watch."

"Where did you get snacks?" Prince Blueblood scratched at his head.

"Pinkie Pie brought them."

"Hi!" Pinkie Pie said.

"Ah!" Blueblood very nearly bumped his head on the ceiling, "Where'd you come from?"

"Well, a long time ago, my mommy and my daddy loved each other very much-"

"She just sort of shows up whenever something interesting happening." Spike said.

"It's a talent!" Pinkie Pie said, and shoved another mouthful of popcorn into her mouth. "Now stop paying attention to me and watch everypony else!"

"Rarity, Applejack, stop it right now!" Twilight stamped on the floor. The two did stop, but mostly because Applejack was sitting on Rarity's neck.

"Honestly, Rarity, I don't know what's gotten into you!"

"'bout a gallon a' homebrew, by my figure." Applejack said.

"Mmph!" Rarity mmphed.

"Ugh!" Twilight rubbed at her temples, and (not for the first time that day) wished she had a drink handy. "Everypony...calm down. There is a perfectly rational explanation for everything that's happened today, if you'll just give me five minutes to-"

"There isn't any time!" The brown-haired pony with the hourglass cutie mark yelled as he came through the door. Roseluck and Captain Jack Harness came in right behind him. The square-jawed pegasus slammed the door shut and leaned against it, barring anyone else from entering. Which was likely a good thing, too, as between the eight ponies (and one baby dragon), Rarity's boutique was becoming very crowded, very fast.

"What *now*?" Twilight said.

"Something terrible's about to Ponyville!" Roseluck said.

"An Emergency?" Twilight pronounced it with the capital letter. "I can deal with that! What's going on?" her horn glowed slightly as she began to recall some useful spells.

"There's no time to explain!" The hourglass pony said. "You've all got to listen to me and do exactly as I say!"

"And why should we do that?" Applejack said.

"Because I'm clever!"

"I'm clever too!" Twilight huffed.

"Of course you are." The hourglass pony said, patting Twilight briefly, patronizingly on the head. "But as things are now, unless we can find something strong enough to act as a lens for a million gigawatt ion pulse, Ponyville is *doomed*."

"Wait, a lens?" Twilight said, "...couldn't you just use that octo-faceted carbonate crystal you took from the store this morning?"

"What octo-faceted carbonate-" The unnamed pony paused, "-oh, *that* octo-faceted carbonate crystal. Of course! Brilliant! C'mon, we've got to go back!" And as soon as they came in, the hourglass'd pony and his two friends charged back out (even if Roseluck had to drag Captain Jack Harness away from Prince Blueblood with a muttered "Not *now*, Jack.>").

Twilight stared at the now open door, noting the distinct lack of an apocalypse going on outside. She found herself perversely disappointed- if nothing else, she knew how to deal with magical crises.

"Those ponies are so random." Pinkie Pie said.

Twilight rubbed at her temples and forced her eyes shut. "If anypony else has anything to say, now's the time to say it."

"I ain't interruptin'." Applejack said.

"Mrph." Rarity said from beneath Applejack.

"I have no idea what's going on!" Pinkie Pie said, cheery.

"Ah, if I might ask..." Prince Blueblood said, scratching at the back of his head, "did anyone get the name of that pegasus pony who was almost as pretty as me? Just, uh, for curiosity's sake."

"Okay!" Twilight said, "Now that we have that taken care of...Rarity, do you promise not to go crazy if Applejack moves?"

"Mrph." Rarity said.

"I'm gonna assume that's a 'yes,' or else I'm going to zap you with a spell."

"Mrph."

"Alright then. Applejack, if you please?"

Applejack nodded, and very slowly stood up. Rarity was back on her hooves and glaring at Twilight in a moment, but she managed to keep the maniacal outbursts to a minimum. "So not only are you doing...*stuff* in my *home*, but you're going to threaten me as well? I suppose I shouldn't be surprised."

"Dernit Rarity, you ain't listenin'. Ain't none of this is Twilight's fault!"

"Thank you!" Twilight said. "Now, as I was *saying*, I never did any...stuff with Prince Blueblood. Or anybody. Your little sister and her friends just got, uh...confused."

"And how, pray tell, did that happen?"

"Eheh. Funny story. Y'see, I was taking Prince Blueblood's measurements."

"Measurements?" Rarity narrowed her eyes. "What...for?"

"He thought I was you! He just heard about some unicorn designer in ponyville, and he just barged in asking for a suit! I tried to tell him the truth, but he wasn't even listening."

"Oh?" Rarity said, "It would take an exceptionally boorish and...dense pony to make your story plausible."

Everypony (and a small dragon) looked at Prince Blueblood.

"I believe you completely." Rarity said, slumping her shoulders, "Which...means I owe you an apology, Twilight. I shouldn't have made such wild conjecture."

"I'll say." Applejack poked Rarity in the shoulder. "Makes me glad ya didn't get into the whiskey."

"That makes two of us." Rarity said, and turned back to Twilight, "Can you ever forgive me?"

"Only if you'll forgive me!" Twilight said, and pulled Rarity into a tight hug. On both sides, tears were shed.

"Hn. How commonly sentimental." Prince Blueblood said, mostly by reflex.

"Oh hey, I just learned a new word!" Spike looked up from the Mareiam-Webster dictionary and elbowed the princely unicorn.

"And I should care...why?"

"The word is 'regicide.' Pretty neat, huh?" Spike smiled, showing off a full set of draconian dentistry.

"OH LOOK AT THE TIME I SHOULD BE GOING NOW." Prince Blueblood announced, and made for the door.

"Don't you *dare*." Rarity said, steel and needles in her voice.

"Please, not the face!" Prince Blueblood ducked down, covering his head with his hooves. "I'm too pretty to be regicided!"

"That's not even a word!" Twilight said.

"Please." Rarity untangled herself from Twilight's hug and circled around Prince Blueblood. "Nobody's going to hurt you, my dear Prince."

"Promise?" He cracked one eye open.

"Of course!" Rarity brushed her hair back behind her ear. "After all, you've still ordered a suit from Ponyville's leading designer, and it would be an absolute *tragedy* if it were wasted as funerary attire, don't you think?"

"...Absolutely." Prince Blueblood said.

"Ah, I knew you'd concur. Now go," Rarity made a dismissive flick of her hoof, "Stop by at about this time tomorrow, and I'll have your suit ready for you."

"Ah. Yes. Quite." Prince Blueblood said. And with one final glance around the boutique, he bolted out the door.

"Well, that certainly ain't how I expected that ta go." Applejack pushed the brim of her hat back. "But heck, nobody's bleedin', n' nothin's on fire, so I can't complain."

"Your optimism is inspiring, Applejack." Rarity deadpanned.

"So, uh. That's it?" Twilight said. "I mean, after all that...a hug and an apology fixes everything?"

"It usually does!" Pinkie Pie said.

"Mmm, yes." Rarity said, smiling a bit. "...funny how things work like that. Though, just between us girls-"

"I'm not a girl!" Spike said.

"-just between us girls and dragons," Rarity corrected herself, "there's another silver lining to be gleaned from this entire fiasco."

"What's that?" Twilight said.

"The absolutely exorbitant price I'm going to charge Prince Blueblood, of course! I mean, there's fashion...and then there's *sbusness*."

"I like the way ya think." Applejack cracked an admiring grin.

"Mmm. So do I." Rarity preened.

"Oh oh oh!" Pinkie Pie said, "I know we're almost done, but there's something important we almost forgot!"

"And that is?" Twilight said.

"PIE." Pinkie grabbed the pie Spike had brought earlier. "I dunno if it's just me, but all those hijinks made me hungry!"

"You didn't do anything but watch!" Spike said.

"I know! I bet you guys are even hungrier." Pinkie Pie giggled. Her laugh was infectious enough to get the rest of the ponies (and baby dragon) chortling along with her.

"Twilight, darling," Rarity said, "I'm sorry it came to this. I can't even *imagine* what it was like. I'd barely know the first thing to do if someone foisted something...scholarly upon me. It must have been worse

for you! I'm just glad I got here before you had to do anything...complicated."

"Er, actually..." Twilight scratched at the back of her head, and glanced over at certain mannequin. Rarity followed Twilight's gaze...and did her best not to wince as she felt her blood go cold.

"Oh. Darling. Is that...puce?"