

The Ballad of Twilight Sparkle

By Gravekeeper

I'M GOING TO
LOVE
AND
TOLERATE
THE SHIT OUT OF YOU.



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Chapter 1

The Summons

“...And that's how I learned to stop worrying, and love the Bomb. Always your faithful student, Twilight Sparkle.” finished narrating the lavender pony with a content flourish, satisfied in her report.

“Twi...”, began her purple dragon scribe, “Do you really think Princess Celestia needs to hear about you guys getting tanked on Pink Jägerbombs?” asked Spike, holding the latest scroll in his hands, prepping it to be sent.

Twilight walked over to her young charge and gave him a noogie, or as much of a noogie a pony can give a dragon. “Come now, Spike! That was a very important lesson in Friendship that Pinkie taught all of us! Granted, I was skeptical at first when she called alcohol a 'Friendship Lubricant', but you can't argue with results!” she said, before giggling at the look Spike was giving her.

“Results, huh?”

Horn glowing with magic, Twilight levitated the dragon over to her desk, placing him near the open window. “You weren't there like I was, Spike. You should've seen Applejack and Rainbow Dash, they were acting like they were super best friends all night.” beamed the pony, nudging Spike. “Looking at them last night, you wouldn't have known they spend all day bickering and one-upping each other- in fact, Pinkie told me that after I passed out, AJ and Dash left to hang out with each other for the rest of the night!”

Spike sighed. “I guess...” he said, reluctantly giving up on his misgivings. As he prepared to fire up the scroll and send it to Canterlot, Spike couldn't help but muse over the fact that Twilight had chosen not to mention in her report that she spent all morning twisting and moaning in absolute despair over her first hangover, asking repeatedly to be taken out of her misery. *'Please Spike, if you truly love me you will light the sacrificial rite and end my suffering!'* he recalled her saying not six hours ago.

Twilight looked on as her latest missive went up in smoke, as it were, being magically delivered to her mentor. “Thanks Spike. Now, could you fetch me the mop? I've got some... mopping to do.” she asked her friend, dreading the

clean-up she had to do in the bathroom after her stomach kindly jettisoned last night's food and Friendship Lubricant.

The dragon flinched a bit. Jumping down from the desk and making his way to the broom closet, images of last night started popping back into his head. In retrospect, he had to begrudgingly admit at being quite impressed with the forcefulness and distance Twilight could put into the art of upchucking. He was less impressed with the location she chose to regale him with the display. *'If she thinks I'm cleaning that up, she must still be drunk off her hooves!'* he thought, retrieving the mop and bucket and walking back to Twilight, on the way passing by the front door, now adorned with three unicorn horn-shaped holes where a certain someone tried to ram the door open in her drunken stupor.

"Here ya go, Twi-" began Spike, before dropping the items and choking out a flame, and with it, a scroll. "What the..."

"Oh my!" Twilight interjected, eyes wide, "That was a quick turnaround!" she said, removing the ribbon on the scroll with her magic, then levitating it to her line of sight. "Oh, this isn't from Celestia..." she said, quickly noticing that the letter was not hand-written.

Spike looked up at the lavender pony, an eyebrow hitched high. "But who else would send a letter through dragonfire? And who else would know my own fireline?"

Twilight's eyes darted from left to right as she quickly scanned through the letter, her mouth moving soundlessly as she read. "It says it's from Metro Goldmane Brayer, Legal Affairs..."

Spike was now intrigued. "Is that the movie studio?"

Twilight nodded, still reading. "Says I'm to meet with them and a... 'Great and Powerful Trixie, The'?" The unicorn's face went quickly from a look of relief, to a look of happiness, to a contorted look of disbelief. "Is 'The' supposed to be her title? What in Equestria is a 'The' supposed to even mean?" she asked no pony in particular as she stomped a hoof in annoyance.

"Focus Twi, why do you have to meet with them?" Spike asked, knowing how Twilight got when she started thinking about the blue unicorn.

Twilight shook her head, shaking off her disgruntlement. "Right, right.... Well," she said, finishing the letter, "they want to talk to me about Author's

Rights and royalty payments..." she answered, trailing off and dropping the scroll.

Spike brought a thumb to his mouth unconsciously, as he pondered on that for a few seconds. "But Twilight... What for? Are you writing a book?" he asked, though he already knew that wasn't the case, seeing as he spent most of his waking time at her side. *'Unless she's been writing one at night with that owl guy!'* he thought, suddenly feeling jealous. He picked up the scroll and started reading it.

The young mare shook her head. "I've no idea, Spike, the only things I've written since college are my research reports, and I send all of those to Celestia... The letter said that they would send a carriage soon to pick me up to take me to Manehattan." she said, making her way to the stairs that led to her loft. "I... I'm going to pack." she said, looking back to where Spike still stood.

Spike blinked. "W-wait, you're actually going?!" he sputtered, dropping the scroll. "Is this because of Trixie? I don-"

Both Spike and Twilight were startled by a knock at the front door. Twilight blinked, and trotted past Spike and towards the Library's lobby. "Uh, coming!" she called as she reached the door. Twilight opened the door, and came face to face with a dark gray pegasus mare, her short black mane gelled back. She wore a black coat and a tie, as well as a chauffeur's cap.

"Miss Sparkle?" asked the professional-looking pegasus with an even tone.

Twilight blinked a few seconds before finding her voice. "Uh.. yeah- I mean, yes, that's me!" she chuckled nervously.

The pegasus bowed her head lightly, then regarded Twilight with serious, but kind eyes. "My name is Holly Diver, I've come to pick you up on behalf of Metro Goldmane Brayer Studios." she said, extending her right front hoof.

Twilight met the pegasus's hoof with her own. "Twilight Sparkle. Pleased to meet you." she said, bowing lightly as well. "You're ah, you're here a lot sooner than I expected." she admitted.

Holly shook her head. "My apologies, I know this is very sudden but as I understand it, this matter requires your presence as soon as possible." she said, as she looked around. After making the sure the coast was clear, Holly's face

took on a mirthful, somewhat malicious grin as she regarded Twilight with conspiratorial eyes.

Twilight was taken aback and resisted the urge to shy away as Holly stepped closer to her and started whispering in her ear. "Your bratty little friend is in a heap of trouble thanks to you!" she finished, almost giggling. Holly stepped back and steeled her face, once again donning her professional decorum. "Ahem, as I said," she began, looking around again, "it is imperative we depart for Manehattan with haste."

The lavender unicorn was more confused than ever before, but she quickly found her wits and nodded nervously. "Yes, yes, uh, let me just grab a few things and I'll be right out!" she said, hurriedly retreating back into the library, almost tripping over Spike as she did so. "S-sorry Spike!" she called, already halfway up the stairs.

A few minutes later, Spike was waiting for Twilight near the front door, stern look and crossed arms at the ready. "And just *where* do you think you're going, young filly?" he asked, clearly quite unhappy.

Twilight, saddlebag in place, stopped in her tracks at the sight of him, but her eyes grew defiant. "Look, Spike, I *have* to go, you know I have to- Trixie's in trouble." she declared and, softening her gaze, continued. "Can I count on my Number One assistant take care of the Library for one day?" she asked, pleading with her eyes.

Spike's gaze hardened.

"Maybe you could invite the Cutie Mark Crusaders to keep you company?" she said, her eyes glittering. '*Almost there...*' she thought. "Hmm, you know? The Cutie Mark Crusaders will need a *babysitter*... Perhaps you could invite Rarity over as well?" she added innocently.

The purple dragon gulped as his eyes wavered. "I... uh..."

'*Gotcha!*' Twilight celebrated internally. "Thanks Spike, you really are the best!" she said, nuzzling him before dashing out the door.

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Much to Twilight's embarrassment, her 'carriage' had been parked in the middle of town, where the ostentatious and unnecessarily-large 5-pegasus limousine was drawing quite a crowd.

"Twilight, *Darling!* I simply *must* know what marvelous, marvelously-rich stallion has sent for you with such a *fabulous* stagecoach!" Rarity exclaimed, making her way through the crowd and next to Twilight, who she spotted with the chauffeur and quickly and wrongly put two and two together.

Twilight chuckled sheepishly. "No, Rarity, it's not-

"Gasp!" gasped Rarity, "why are *you* carrying that saddlebag? Shouldn't the hired help be, well, *helping* you with that?" she asked, glaring at Holly Diver, who glared right back. Rarity turned to Twilight once more. "And Twilight, Honey, why didn't you *tell* me you would be holding audience with an esteemed member of high society? We could have done something, *anything* with your mane and coat!"

The streak-maned unicorn blinked. "I uh... What's wrong with my mane?" Twilight asked, somewhat worried.

"I feel I must remind Miss Sparkle that we are needed in Manehattan *within the hour.*" Holly interjected, still glaring at Rarity, who huffed and turned her muzzle upwards, closing her eyes indignantly.

"Sorry Rarity, I have to go now- this was very short-notice; if I had known, I would most certainly have sought your help getting ready." Twilight reassured, putting a hoof on Rarity's shoulder.

Rarity tsk'd. "Oh, I *know* you would have, Darling." she smiled at her friend.

Twilight smiled back. "I'll see everypony later, ok? Oh and Rarity, I know this is quite sudden, but I was wondering if you and your sister could perhaps keep Spike company while I'm away?" she asked as she reached the door of the carriage, Holly Diver holding it open for her.

"I would *love* to, Twilight." Rarity replied, hoof on her chest, chin held high. "But you simply must tell me *everything* about Manehattan and the beautiful stallion you're meeting there when you come back! Do we have a deal, Sweetie?" she asked, her eyes glittering with gossip-lust.

Twilight chuckled. "It's a deal, Rarity." she agreed, stepping into the carriage.

Holly Diver made her way to the front of the luxurious vehicle, taking her position forward of the five other pegasus ponies that were already rigged to the spacious chariot. After donning her own rig, she turned to the pegasus mare to her right. "Preflight checklist?"

"Complete", replied the white, red-maned pegasus, sporting similar attire and manestyle as Holly.

"Winds aloft?" Holly continued, watching as the crowd parted to give them room for take-off.

"25-knot tailwind at 10,000." continued the white pegasus, all business.

"Perfect. Flight plan?"

"Filed. Ponyville Flight Service will provide vectoring." So dry.

Holly turned her head and faced her first officer with a grin. "Care to take the command for this flight, Rafale?"

"WOULD I?!" beamed Rafale, before blushing brightly and trying to get back her serious face. "Er... Yes Captain."

Inside the carriage, Twilight heard as each of the six pegasi started flapping their wings, one after the other, until a steady, reverberating hum permeated the cabin. Resting her chin on her hoof, elbow on the windowsill, she watched as the scenery started accelerating past, before retreating downwards and giving way to the blue skies, pockmarked with small clouds, a rare sight this time of day.

"I guess Rainbow Dash must still be hanging with Applejack." Twilight concluded. She wondered what became of her other friends as the carriage climbed even higher. "Maybe they're still hung over?" she asked herself, watching as the miles and miles of Sweet Apple Acres became less distinguishable with the ascending height. She felt slightly bad for her friends; if her first hangover was this bad and she had been the first to pass out, Twilight couldn't even imagine how the rest were faring if they actually kept on drinking through the night. She was slightly amazed that Rarity looked as beautiful as ever, not trace of a bad morning on her.

'Speaking of beautiful unicorns...' Twilight mused as Manehattan's skyline became visible towards the horizon. Twilight blinked. "Whoa, where did *that* come from?" she chuckled nervously, eyes darting left and right, even though she knew no one else was in the carriage. Twilight sighed heavily. She had spent a few months looking for Trixie, but her duties at the Library meant that she couldn't wander away too far or for too long. She felt compelled to find the magician, and was worried about the fact that Trixie had left all of her mostly-destroyed belongings back in Ponyville. *'How did you make do without your stage? Your bits? Your stagecoach?'* wondered Twilight, a pained worry clear on her face. *'You didn't have to run away, Trixie, we could've helped you.'*

During her search, Twilight had come across evidence that Trixie had managed to get back on her feet again. Nearby towns spoke of the dazzling showmare and her amazing stories about the great unicorn, but Twilight always seemed to miss Trixie by a day or two. Just as she did in Ponyville, The Great and Powerful Trixie seemed to just roll into town without previous announcements, put on a show, and then continue to the next one.

Twilight's eye twitched. *'How can anypony live without a schedule? She could be maximizing her exposure and audience if they actually knew when her shows were gonna happen!'* she thought, bringing a hoof to her face as she rubbed the bridge of her muzzle. Thinking about Trixie and what she could do to be all the greater and powerful...er always put Twilight in a *mood*. Twilight could understand why Spike was worried- she had no reason to care that much about a pony that acted like a jackass to her and her friends. "But I do..." Twilight admitted in resignation. "Trixie, what in the world did you get yourself wrapped up in now? Haven't you learned your lesson?" Twilight asked the empty cabin, which refused to reply.

Twilight retreated from the window and rested back on the plush seat of the carriage, her eyes closing as she let her thoughts lull her to sleep.

Chapter 2

Mare in the Big City

Spike watched from the window of the library's first floor as the gaudy-looking carriage took to the sky. "I hope you know what you're doing, Twilight..." he murmured before jumping back down from the windowsill. With a sigh, he started picking up the clutter Twilight had left in her wake after coming in at two in the morning, thoroughly stunk up and incoherent. He'd read in the news about drunk flying, drunk carriage operators, and all manner of irresponsible activities being performed by ponies with less-than-ideal blood-alcohol levels, but he never thought he'd see *drunk researching*.

Between periodic trips to the bathroom, the inebriated mare had actually started going through her books in search of a spell to, well, Spike actually didn't know. Her reading ability at this point not really an 'ability', she had begun to angrily argue with her books, breaking into heaving sobs as she believed them to have suddenly changed languages to spite her. '*Tw, you're trying to, uh, read them upside-down.*' Spike shook his head at the memory. Twilight's sudden burst of tears had mellowed out just as suddenly, at which point she began amorously caressing one of the hard covers, and cooing at it.

"I *sniff* forgive youh, book... bookie... bookbookie..." she slurred, planting soft kisses on the spine of the deep blue book. "You'd... you'll never gonna leave me, bookbookie, you'd let me help you, not run away and disappear forever and then I can't fuh-find yooouuuu~" Twilight finished with a pained wail.

Spike's eyes twitched as he recalled that part. He made the decision then and there to never, ever consume a drop of alcohol in his life when he became of age. As he kept picking up books and sundry items, he managed to stumble upon a pair of items that should have been in the broom closet, not out there in the middle of the lobby.

He blinked as he looked at the cleaning instruments. He squinted his eyes, before they suddenly became wide with horror as he remembered why the mop and bucket were out there in the first place. "Confound that pony!" he screamed, as the realization set in as to the nature of the dark deed that awaited him in the bathroom.

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Twilight awoke with a start as the carriage which she occupied shook lightly but insistently. "Bluh?" she asked intelligently, eyes unfocused and half-lidded. Wiping the drool from her mouth and the luxurious seat she had just been resting on, Twilight quickly sat back up and tried her best to smooth her mane back and not look so obviously bed-headed. Looking out the window, she realized that the source of the rumbling was the carriage's wheels, now in contact with the ground, as it was taxied around the busy streets of downtown Manehattan, awash in long shadows created by the late-afternoon sun.

She smiled at the sight- it had been so long since she had been around a large, bustling city like this one; a city by the bay, a city that rocks, a city that never sleeps! Her eyes lit up at the sights and sounds she passed by- stately and stuffy Manehattanites, trendy and angsting hoofers, oat-dog vendors poaching boiled cabbage, boombox-carrying street studs; they certainly were a varied bunch out in the city! The streets were wide and full of carriages big and small, all matter of pony drawing and occupying them. A little colt waved happily at her from a red carriage two lanes over, and Twilight cheerfully returned the wave, smiling brightly.

Realizing that the carriage was slowing down, Twilight turned her gaze skyward, now finding herself in the shade of a massively tall building. Scanning the large plaza that the metallic skyscraper occupied, she spotted a beautiful fountain with a bronze statue of a muscular winged pony with large hooves. The monumental pony was standing on its hind legs, forelegs kicking triumphantly in the air. Squinting, she barely made out the large font on the statue's plaque. "Clydesler Building..."

And then, as she scanned further down the plaza, Twilight saw her. *Her*. Twilight's face reddened as she started grinding her teeth. The Great and Powerful Trixie, her posture haughty, her smile genuine in her belief of superiority. Twilight wasn't even sure if there was anypony else with her- she *looked* like she was addressing someone, but the lavender unicorn could only focus on that... that *entity* that got closer and closer as the carriage reached its destination. Twilight's hooves trembled with ire. *'How dare you be so happy and carefree? I busted my rump looking for you, you little witch!'*

Twilight felt her anger reaching a fevered pitch. *'Two whole months where no pony in all of Equestria knew where you were! Two whole months where I didn't know where you were!'* The carriage halted. Twilight glared daggers at the

door. *'You ran into the Everfree Forest! You could have **died!**'* Twilight was willing herself to not blast open the carriage door. *'And then you just suddenly pop back into the news again, same old show- the greatest unicorn in the land- as if nothing had happened! I bet you **knew** I was looking for you!'* The carriage's door opened, courtesy of Rafale, but whatever the pegasus may have said was lost to the void of Twilight's tunnel vision. *You're not even looking this way! You could care less about what you put me through!'*

The Great and Powerful Trixie laughed airily as she finished telling the newscolt her latest anecdote. She had heard Rafale announcing Twilight Sparkle's arrival but frankly she was having too much fun with her captive audience of newsponies, and secretly trying to put off talking to the lavender unicorn as much as she could. She would have preferred to keep contact at a minimum, perhaps not even addressing her until they were at the legal office, but curiosity got the best of her as she noticed that all the newsponies were no longer paying attention to her.

"Really guys," Trixie chuckled, *"she's just a silly filly from Nowhere, Equestria...!"* the laughter in her voice died down as she turned around to face Twilight Sparkle. Or, was it? The Great and Powerful Trixie took pride in her photographic memory, a real boon to her elaborate performances; Twilight Sparkle was most certainly not a red-eyed, bright-yellow *fire-maned beast*. *"squeak."*

Before anypony gathered there could really begin to comprehend what was happening, a bright flash invaded their eyes as Twilight burned out her transformation, reverting back to a slightly singed, lavender unicorn with a streaked, dark mane. The Great and Powerful Trixie was about to comment, but diction left her as she was hit full-force by the biggest, saddest puppy-dog eyes she had ever seen.

"Why, Trixie?" Twilight asked, almost whispered. Then the tears came. *"I was so worried about you!"* declared the pony, jumping and hug-tackling The Great and Powerful Trixie to the ground.

For her part, Trixie was still quite speechless and downright horrified, as all around her the newsponies used this opportunity to start taking pictures of The Great and Powerful Trixie looking quite not 'Great' or 'Powerful' (Or 'The'). Trixie *would* have continued to worry about the contents of tomorrow's tabloids, but she was currently being nuzzled by the weepy unicorn on top of her, and that was destroying her motor and mental skills quite thoroughly.

"Don't you know how long you made me look for you?" sobbed Twilight, not wanting to let go of the infuriating jerk of a pony she so hated. And that's when it happened. Twilight had let her defenses down, and as she nuzzled Trixie, her horn came in contact with the magician's own horn. The contact proved to be electrifying.

Literally. Twilight choked out a surprised gasp as she felt a bolt of unfettered magic arc between their horns, the dark-maned pony trying desperately to reign in her sudden magical paroxysm.

Trixie whinnied and bucked under her, not expecting to be suddenly injected with that much magic- it only took a second for the showmare to lose control of her own magic as her horn started discharging the excess energy, blasting one of the nearby cameraponies and turning him into a potted cactus.

For their part, the newsponies covering the developing disaster took one surprised look at the plant, then continued taking pictures of the unicorn pair while dodging errant magic bolts. One newspony was not quick enough, getting hit by a blast that turned her mane into a row of beautiful roses. "Oooh..." she cooed, smelling one of the flowers, before fireworks started exploding from each flower, causing an even bigger commotion and general panic among those gathered there.

Twilight's eyes widened as she finally gathered her wits enough to realize that yes, there *were* other ponies there besides Trixie, *'How did I not notice them before?'* Looking down, she noticed the blue unicorn under her, staring back with an indescribable mix of fury and embarrassment on her face. Twilight blinked, *'Ohmygosh did I just... Oh no I had a premature casting!'* cringed the lavender pony, blushing brightly. "I-I swear this never happened to me before!" she pleaded, *'I'm not a 14-year-old foal anymore, how could I lose control like that?'*

The Great and Powerful Trixie was in panic mode. This was emphatically *not* how this reunion was supposed to go down- all thanks to *Twilight Sparkle* once again sticking her admittedly amorous muzzle where it didn't belong, *again*. Thirty seconds is all it took for the lavender menace to potentially destroy The Great and Powerful Trixie's career, *again!* And the newsponies! Every newspaper in the city was there. With cameras. *'We need to get away before she scuttles my reputation, again-again!'*

Trixie grabbed Twilight's shoulder and started shaking her to stop her blubbering, then she pointed at the large building in the middle of the plaza.

“INSIDE. NOW.” Trixie declared with a finality in her voice that held no room for objections.

Twilight nodded nervously. “O-OKAY, but you *have* to believe me that that's never ever ever happened to me before!” she added, before her horn started building up energy once again. Before Trixie could ask what was the lavender pony up to, they both disappeared in a crackle of magic.

The transformations cast on the newsponies reversed as soon as the magical pair disappeared, and then an utterly awkward silence permeated the air among everypony present: newsponies, curious bystanders, and the six pegasi that had flown Twilight Sparkle to her meeting. No one knew quite what to say or how to react, until a strange sound drew everypony's attention to the dark pegasus mare rigged to the fancy carriage.

It was a throaty *snerk*, as Holly Diver shook slightly, her head bowed and her eyes closed with noticeable force, her eyelids trembling with tears forming at their edges. Rafale peeked out from under the carriage, where she had taken cover from the magic show, and regarded her Captain with worry. “Cap'n, are you okay...?”

“PPFFFFFFFFTTGWAHAHAHAAH~!” guffawed Holly Diver quite loudly, startling everypony. “HAHAH*wheeze*OHGOSH!” she was on the floor now, “that was SO worth having to cart around that bratty blue *witch* everywhere for the past month!” she was gonna laugh her flank off. “HAHAHA, oh colt I'm gonna pee myself! HAHAHAHA!”

Rafale blushed as she pulled down her cap to cover her face, utterly embarrassed at the spectacle her Captain was making. She wanted to find a hole to crawl into, and possibly a second one to bury her Captain in.

Chapter 3

Warp Holes and Revelations

Rarity hummed cheerfully, her horn glowing with magic as she worked on her latest design, pencil moving by telekinesis and sketching smooth, flowing lines on a small canvas. The drawing was expertly taking shape, revealing her next sure-fire success in the world of fashion. The elegant unicorn chuckled lightly, *'It won't be long now before Hoity Toity's Galleria will be made up entirely by my designs!'*

It had been a lazy and slow afternoon at the library, something that afforded Rarity with the chance to continue her design work, despite the presence of the *energetic* Cutie Mark Crusaders, who had spent the first two hours at the Library bouncing off the walls and generally sowing discord and disharmony wherever their little hooves trotted. It was a small wonder they had quieted down and settled in the basement to play by themselves. *'Thank Celestia.'*

Rarity looked to her side, where a tuckered-out Spike sat on a high stool watching her work, a content smile plastered on his face. Rarity smiled right back at him- the little dragon had been ecstatic at seeing her arrive with the Cutie Mark Crusaders, *'He must've been feeling lonely, the poor thing.'* she guessed, remembering that the purple reptilian had stayed at her side all afternoon, watching her sketch and helping her curb the CMC's overflowing enthusiasm. "Such a helpful young dragon you are, Spike."

Spike nearly fell off his stool, caught off-guard by the compliment. That simple line was enough to lift his spirits and make him forget the hardships he'd endured in the past 24 hours, cleansing him of all he'd seen and heard from his drunken owner. He gave Rarity a goofy grin. "Shucks Rarity, I-"

"THERE'S TH'VARMINT!" shouted Apple Bloom from across the room, head peeking out from the basement door, before doing a forward roll and striking a pose. The filly was wearing a metal buckler on her back.

Behind her, Scootaloo leapt from the basement and took her place to the left of Apple Bloom, an oversized sword sheathed around her back, dragging the tip on the floor. "CUTIE MARK CRUSADERS: ROYAL GUARD: DRAGOON SQUADRON: SPECIAL OPS; TEN-HUT!"

“For Equestria! For FREEDOM!” shouted Sweetie Belle, taking her place in between her two other friends, the tip of a halberd tied around her horn. “My sisters! Tonight we earn our Dragon-slaying Cutie Marks or die trying- FOR THE PRINCESSES!” she declared, lowering her head and pointing her bladed horn in the general direction of Spike.

The only dragon in the room gulped. “D-Dragon-slaying?!”

Rarity heaved a tired sigh as she put away her sketching tools. *‘I suppose 15 minutes of quiet was stretching it a bit.’*

“CHAAAARGE!”

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The Great and Powerful Trixie had seen many things and many locations in her young life, the result of her nomadic lifestyle. Sure, she may have added certain *embellishments* to the more boring aspects, but as a whole, the blue unicorn felt she was a worldly pony.

The folds between dimensions, however, did not count towards her sum of worldly experiences considering they were quite literally out of this world. Looking at the lavender pony whose hooves she was currently holding, The Great and Powerful Trixie began to wonder if she was even supposed to be conscious for this part of whatever spell Twilight Sparkle was currently casting; the dark-maned mare seemed to be currently unresponsive, except for her pupil-less, glowing eyes and shining horn.

As far as Trixie could tell, they seemed to be traipsing through this not-space at a fairly good clip, despite the fact that they were both just... floating there. Turning her head and scanning the void of nothingness and everything, she suddenly came face-to-face with two big, blue, smiling eyes. Trixie was sure she developed arrhythmia from the scare.

“HI! HIIIIII!” the pink pony waved, standing too close for comfort. “I know you! I know you!” the pony shouted, hopping with excitement. “Do you remember me? Of COURSE you do! I know *everypony*, so that means that everypony knows *me!*”

The blue unicorn felt that the arrhythmia may have also given her an aneurysm, because her brain was trying so hard to understand what was going on, but it just wasn't happening. Truly, she couldn't brain right now.

It was at that point that Twilight's horn sparked, suddenly shooting out a beam across the infinity of the aether. The pink earth pony's form stretched infinitely in the *opposite* direction of the infinity that lay ahead of the two unicorns. "Aw phooey! You guys are leaving already? No fair, Twilight never stays here for more than two or three shakes! At least tell me where you're going!"

Shakes? As in milkshakes? This was ridiculous, Trixie surmised- clearly a dream. "The Great and Powerful Trixie will be at the Clydesler Building if you need her, Dream Pony!" Trixie waved, deciding to play along.

"Okie-Dokie-Loki!"

"Whuh... what?" Trixie asked, getting up from the tiled floor of the Clydesler Building's main lobby.

A light orange unicorn pony regarded her with a very unamused face, her yellow eyes glowering. "I was *asking*, Miss Trixie, if you were *quite done* trying to destroy this production with your little stunt out there." the pony's dark red mane had a straight cut that fell to both sides of her head and neck. Her cutie mark, a quill and inkwell, had always made Trixie wonder.

The showmare decided to ignore the fact that Twilight Sparkle had apparently *teleported* them inside for now, because that was ridiculous and frankly quite impossible. She regarded the orange mare with equal annoyance. "The Great and Powerful Trixie would like to remind a certain Miss Spelling that The Great and Powerful Trixie was *not* the pony that called this... this *ruinous interloper* here!" Trixie huffed, facing away from the orange unicorn and pointing an accusatory hoof at the lavender pony lying on the floor.

Twilight Sparkle slowly got back on her hooves, wobbling slightly like a newborn foal. Teleportation always left her feeling a bit out of sorts, and for some reason, everything always tasted blue for a while afterward. She shook her head and focused on the two unicorns in front of her, seemingly in some sort of argument.

"Is that so?" Spelling used her magic to adjust her rimless glasses. "Well, *The* Miss Spelling would like to remind The Great and Powerful Trixie that

without The 'Ruinous Interloper', The Great and Powerful Trixie's film will never see the light of day."

Twilight wondered what in Equestria they were talking about, but at the moment she was too busy staring at the admittedly fancy floor, wallowing in utter shame at how she had reacted when she saw Trixie. *'What got into me? How could I have jumped her like that!'* Twilight heard the discussion quiet down around her, and she looked up to find Holly Diver standing in front of her, holding Twilight's saddlebag.

"Miss Sparkle, your luggage." said the professional pegasus, stone-faced except for her eyes, which trembled with barely-contained mirth.

"Oh, thank you, Ms. Diver..." she said, numbly grabbing it from the other pony. *'She looks like she wants to laugh... Oh Celestia, I can't believe I cast all over Trixie's face like that!'*

The orange unicorn used her magic to materialize a checkbook. "Holly, would you care to do some overtime work for me?" she asked as the checkbook floated over to the dark pegasus. "I need you and your crew to find each newspony that witnessed Trixie's *episode* and persuade them to give up their cameras and sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement."

Holly Diver grabbed the checkbook with her mouth, and raised a knowing eyebrow as she pocketed the powerful object in her coat. "The usual amount?"

Miss Spelling brought a pensive hoof to her chin. "Hmm, make it triple for the two ponies that got turned into floral arrangements." she answered, waving her hoof dismissively. Inwardly, Miss Spelling wondered how many more bits Trixie's antics were going to cost the studio.

"Right." Holly nodded, "Well, if you'll excuse me, Miss Spelling, Ms. Trixie," she turned and winked at Twilight. "Ms. Sparkle."

Trixie rolled her eyes as she watched the *insufferable* chauffeur leave; she did *not* like how friendly the hired help was being to Twilight. *'They'll hire anypony these days.'* Casting a sidelong glance at Twilight Sparkle, The Great and Powerful Trixie deduced that the Interloper seemed to be knee-deep in shame-wallowing. She felt a pang of... empathy? Trixie had to chuckle internally at her mind's suggestion that she should feel anything like *that* towards this pony of destruction. *'Still, I suppose if we're going to get her to sign, she should be in at least better spirits.'*

“You go on ahead, *The Miss Spelling*, for The Great and Powerful Trixie *refuses* to attend this meeting unless she is looking her best!” she said, giving Twilight a light shove. “Come, you little cry-filly, we must clean you up lest you make The Great and Powerful Trixie look bad by association.”

“H-hey, please stop shoving!” complained Twilight, being completely ignored as she got pushed into an elevator by the blue unicorn. Twilight watched as Trixie used her magic to press the button to the top floor and curiously enough, the door-close button at the same time; then Trixie proceeded to stand next to her and look straight ahead at the now-closing elevator door. As the lift began its slow ascent, Twilight began fidgeting, the silence deafening and only helping her mind to fester in its bad thoughts. Each barely-audible 'ding' made her flinch a little, so consumed she was in her embarrassment. *'I have to stop thinking about it, Trixie hasn't even mentioned it... Maybe she didn't notice?'* Twilight psyched herself up with false hope, and decided to break the cacophony of quietude. “So.. Uh... A movie...?” she asked, awkwardly.

'Well of course she would be an elevator talker.' Trixie sighed. “If you *must* know, yes- one of The Great and Powerful Trixie's shows has finally caught the eyes of a very prominent Hollyhoof director.” said the magician haughtily.

Twilight couldn't help to be impressed; Trixie had made the jump from roadshow pony to screenplay writer in half a year! “And which show?” asked the studious mare, feeling strangely uplifted at Trixie's apparent success, “Let me guess, does it involve a Great and Powerful pony vanquishing an Ursa Major?” she asked playfully, already feeling better.

Trixie blushed, then harrumphed indignantly. “Yes, as a matter of fact it does! But The Great and Powerful Trixie is no one-trick pony!” she continued, challenging Twilight with her eyes. “The Great and Powerful Trixie's *new* show has even impressed the highest ponies of the Canterlot court!”

Twilight blinked. *'Celestia never mentioned this to me!'* The elevator reached the 81st floor, and both unicorns exited. The lavender mare followed the blue magician down a stately hallway, exquisitely decorated, comparable to the decor down the halls of the castle back at Canterlot!

Trixie felt a certain elation at the amazement plastered so obviously on Twilight's face. “Obviously as the genius visionary behind this cinematographic *tour de force*, The Great and Powerful Trixie has been granted the use of this very *exclusive* penthouse.” Trixie giggled, “An *amazing* apartment for an *amazing*

pony, don't you agree?" she asked as she produced the penthouse's card key, apparently hidden in her mane.

Twilight felt a pang of sadness. "Trixie... I'm happy for your success, I really am but, must you be so boastful?"

The Great and Powerful Trixie flinched slightly as she stepped through the door, "I-It's not boasting if it's true now, is it?" the azure pony went into the beautiful kitchen of the apartment.

Twilight's gaze traced around the apartment- it really was quite royal. "Look, Trixie, I've been meaning to talk-" SLAP. A wet towel to the face. "Whuh...!"

"Wipe your face. You look like you've been crying and drooling and roasting in an oven."

Twilight blushed as she did what she was told; she hadn't realized that all of the day's events could be so easily read on her face. After wiping her face and singe marks, *'When did I get those...?'*, Twilight watched as Trixie walked back to her, a soft brush floating by her magic. "Hey...!" she complained after the magician used said magic to push Twilight onto a chair.

Standing behind the seated unicorn, Trixie hovered the brush over Twilight's mane, contemplating it. *'You have no right to look so good with bed-mane!'* Trixie frowned, feeling somewhat jealous at Twilight's effortless looks. "Really, the second most-powerful unicorn in Equestria, and yet you squander your life away *sleeping*... Just *look* at this mess you call a mane."

'Ohmygosh she's brushing my hair!' She thinks I'm powerful! She thinks I'm... a slacker?" Twilight was blushing for a *number* of reasons right now. "I do *not* s-squander my life away!" Twilight turned her head to face Trixie, but the blue mare used her magic to gently turn her away again.

"Stay still while I try to work on this disaster." Trixie explained, smoothing out the librarian's mane.

Twilight fidgeted a bit, suddenly feeling completely flustered under Trixie's gentle ministrations. "I... I just had a late night out..." she explained shyly.

Twilight yelped in surprise at the sudden forceful tug Trixie gave the brush she was using on her mane. "A... Late night out?" Trixie felt something of a lump

in her throat, and a sinking feeling at the pit of her stomach. *'The Great and Powerful Trixie does not care what some silly mare does at night or with whom!'* Trixie internalized, "The Great and Powerful Trixie didn't take her mortal enemy for *that* kind of pony!" she goaded, digging for answers.

Twilight quickly spun and faced Trixie again, blushing brighter than ever, before Trixie once again turned her away. "What kind of pony are you talking about? I was just out drinking with my friends! I'm allowed to do that! I'm not a little filly anymore!" Twilight's voice was defensive and somewhat petulant as she flailed her hooves, "And mortal enemy? Why am I your mortal enemy?" she tried turning around again, but Trixie had been expecting it, and held her in place.

'Out with her friends...' A weight was lifted from Trixie's back as she released a breath she didn't know she had been holding. The Great and Powerful Trixie was instantly feeling quite a bit chipper than she had been ten seconds ago. Smiling broadly, the azure unicorn spun Twilight to face her, and was met with an *adorable* sight- that of a blushing, pouting, annoyed Twilight Sparkle. Playfully brushing Twilight's locks down over her eyes, Trixie beamed at the bookworm.

"That's what we *are*, you simple filly- that's *why you're here*; there's a character based on you in my movie," Trixie explained as she floated the brush away to a nearby table. "and we need you to sign off on that, *you know...*" Trixie walked back to the kitchen, ducking down behind the counter. "...Give us permission to use your likeness, not sue us for damages or defamation; it's just a formality, really..." Trixie produced a bottle of clear liquid. "You'll be properly compensated for your consent, of course- The Great and Powerful Trixie is as benevolent as she is amazing!" the unicorn declared, excitedly kicking her front hooves before quickly settling down.

Turning to face the stunned Twilight Sparkle, Trixie smiled broadly. "Vodka?"

Chapter 4

And Justice For All

“Shucks Ms. Rarity, we wasn't *really* gunna hurt 'im none, honest!” Apple Bloom flailed uselessly, currently being held a few feet off of the floor by magical telekinesis.

“Yeah!” interjected Scootaloo, under the effects of the same magic. “We were just gonna *whale* on him a little, ya know,” the eager pegasus made a few kicking motions with her forelegs, “... until our Dragon-slaying cutie marks appeared- then we were *totally* gonna stop, for reals!”

Sweetie Belle tried her best puppy-dog stare on her sister. “We're *very* sorry Sis...” her eyes sparkled, the cuteness of a thousand foals contained within, “C-can we keep the-”

“*Absolutely not.*” Rarity stamped her hoof, before magically uninstalling the halberd blade from Sweetie Belle's horn and attaching it to her own; across her back, the buckler and sword rested, secured by leather straps. “I will put *these* back where they belong, while *you* three will get your rumps up to the loft, and you will *stay* there until bedtime.” the white unicorn said with finality, releasing her magical hold on them.

“What a gyp!” “C'mon sis!” “Ain't fair!” “It's still light out!” “Booo!” came the chorus of complaints- there were so many weapon-related cutie marks to try for!

Rarity turned her head, hearing a soft knock at the door. “Up. Now.” she stated, turning back to the troublemakers.

“But~!”

“Up up up up-up-up-upupupupup!” Rarity giggled, chasing the giggling trio halfway up the heart-stamped stairs, watching them continue on and into Twilight's study. She breathed a drawn-out sigh as she trotted back down and towards the door. “Coming~!” she called. “Good afternoon!” Rarity opened the door, surprised to find a slightly haggard Fluttershy on the other side. “*Darling!*” she exclaimed, stepping outside.

“Um, not so loud, please...” cringed the yellow pegasus, lowering her head with a pained grimace.

“Oh honey, I apologize-” Rarity stepped closer and put a comforting hoof on the delicate mare. “...are you still feeling the effects of last night's party? You look a bit paler than usual.”

“... I...” Fluttershy looked up with bloodshot eyes, fell back on her haunches, and quickly shuffled away with an 'eep!'.

Rarity looked at the wallflower like she had grown a second set of wings. “Fluttershy, maybe you ought to get some rest-”

Fluttershy put her forelegs in front of her face as Rarity approached her. “Please don't... I'll give the bits back... um, it was a silly bet anyways...”

Rarity blinked. “Sweetie, what *are* you on about? You won that money fair and square- you have a *magnificent* aptitude for hard liquor!” she exclaimed, bringing up a hoof to scratch her shoulder, where the sword's leather strap was starting to bother her and... Oh, yeah. That. “Oh, oh no no no-no-no, Fluttershy! This, this isn't what you think!” the weaponized pony giggled nervously, *'I can't very well let on that the Cutie Mark Crusaders were playing with weapons on my watch!'*

Turning around and posing for the ex-model, Rarity used her horn to cast an illusion of an endless meadow, thousands of swords stuck into the soil at random angles and distances from one another, as if they had fallen from the skies like rain. “This is *Shield-Maiden Chic!*” she beamed, dispelling the fields of unlimited blades. “It's *all* the rage back at Trottingham- quite the *brave* fashion statement, don't you think?” Rarity turned to give her profile to the pegasus, thrusting out her chest, arching her neck and raising a hoof, looking positively heroic.

Settling down a bit, Fluttershy offered her spa-buddy a tiny smile. “It's very lovely, Rarity.” she answered sincerely.

The unicorn dropped her pose. *'It is?!'* Rarity's surprise almost betrayed her confident face. “Well of *course* it is! But enough about me- do tell me, what brings you to the Library today, Fluttershy?”

The soft-spoken mare's gaze turned skyward as she searched through the haze of her hangover-riddled mind for an answer. “Oh, I was gonna ask

Twilight... and-I, and you too, Rarity, I wasn't gonna forget about you... the, um... The weather pegasi, they can't find Rainbow Dash..." the meek pegasus pointed a hoof skyward, the afternoon sun barely visible among the many clouds over Ponyville.

"I'm afraid Twilight isn't here at the moment, but..." Remembering quite well the events of the night before, Rarity didn't need to wonder *too* hard about the confident pegasus's whereabouts. "...as for Rainbow Dash, Darling, have you checked Sweet Apple Acres?" she asked, raising an eyebrow at her friend.

Fluttershy shook her head. "Um, no- I thought she would be here, because of the-" it took her a moment to decipher Rarity's eyebrow. "Oh my...! Yes, I.. I-I suppose that would make sense after... after last night..." Fluttershy almost melted in the heat of her blush. "Well, I guess I should go look for them, I mean *her*! Look for her!"

"Take care!" Rarity suppressed a giggle as she watched the poor pegasus very unsteadily take to the sky, wings beating out of time with each other. Trotting back into the Library, Rarity had to wonder just *how* Fluttershy was still standing- let alone *flying*- after her sublime feats in the art of alcohol consumption less than a day ago.

Absentmindedly closing the door with her magic, Rarity stepped up to the middle of the lobby and started calling for the young, mercifully not-slain dragon. "Come on out, Honey! The fillies are up in the loft!" Rarity walked towards the kitchen, the general direction in which Spike had scampered off to in fright. "Spike?" she called again, opening the cabinets one by one. As she opened the second-to-last one, a pair of cyan hooves stuck out, holding the purple dragon out to her.

Spike waved. "Hi Rarity."

"Ah, there you are!" the unicorn used her magic to float Spike down from the cabinet and onto her back, placing him on top of the small metal shield. "Thank you, Rainbow Dash."

"No prob, Rare. Lookin' kinda cool there."

Closing the cabinet, Rarity trotted back to the table where she had left her sketches. "I'm dreadfully sorry about Sweetie Belle's behavior today Spike, I hope this doesn't reflect badly upon your opinion of me."

'Who is this beautiful warrior princess that has come to rescue my heart?' Spike was beside himself, almost at a loss for words. "N-no way, Rarity! I could never think badly o-of you!"

"You are such a sweetie, Spike! I- *RAINBOW DASH?!'*" Sketches and pencils flying in her wake, Rarity bolted to the kitchen and nearly tore the offending cabinet's door off its hinges. "Rainbow Dash what in Equestria are you doing in there?!" the unicorn stamped her hoof lividly, her immature-filly tolerance levels already depleted thanks to the Cutie Mark Crusaders.

Rainbow Dash flinched at Rarity's shrill voice, looking rather uncomfortable stuffed in the cabinet, surrounded by cereal boxes and spices. "Keep it down, will ya?"

"Tell me what you are doing in Twilight's kitchen!" Rarity was *not* in the mood for this. A safe distance away, Spike covered his mouth so as not to burst out laughing at Rainbow Dash's predicament.

The cyan pegasus eyed Rarity's newest accessory warily. "Careful where ya point that thing!" Rainbow Dash sighed. "Look, I'm uh, kinda hiding from Applejack right now, so if you-" A sudden, insistent pounding at the door made the startled acrobat hit her head against the top of the cabinet.

"Twilight? Twilight sug, you in there? Ah need to speak with ya!" called a familiar voice from outside, the pony still knocking on the door with a bit more force than necessary.

"Just a minute!" shouted Rarity loudly but sweetly, before turning her attention back to Rainbow Dash. "You better not have broken her heart!" the designer whispered as she glared daggers at the weather pegasus, who looked like she was about object before Rarity closed the cabinet door on her.

Applejack shifted nervously as she waited for Twilight to answer the door. *'I hope that hot-headed filly can forgive me...'* she mused, looking down and wondering why in the world the Library's front door seemed to be covered in splinters and small holes. The farmer turned her gaze back up as the door opened. "Whoah Nelly!" Applejack stood on her hind legs, kicking the air with her forelegs. "Rarity?! What in tarnation-"

"Fashion statement." Rarity deadpanned.

Applejack settled back on all fours, tilting her head in confusion. "That's a right powerful statement yer makin' there, sugarcube." she commented, '*Fashion statement or declaration of war?*'

Rarity giggled, "I suppose it is!" the unicorn made a mental note to incorporate weaponry in her next batch of designs- who knew violence could be stylish? "Now, Twilight Sparkle is not in today, but perhaps I could be of some aid?"

The orange earth pony fidgeted a bit. "Well, ah reckon this here's a personal matter, but ah just can't find Rainbow Dash anywhere... I fig'erd she might be holed up in here at the Library, on account of the-"

"Oh, I am so sorry, Applejack-" interrupted Rarity, a bit loudly. "I haven't seen our friend *all day*." she continued, making obvious gestures with her eyes. '*She's in here!*' they said. "Perhaps I could pass a message along?"

Applejack furrowed her brow, wondering what was wrong with Rarity's eyes, before realization settled in. "Oh, *oh!* Yeah, a message, right! Well, if you see her, couldya please tell 'er that I've been lookin' for her all afternoon? Just tell 'er that we need to talk about..." Applejack's ears drooped slightly, "...about this mornin'..." the cowpony blushed. "Don' want that silly filly gettin' th'wrong impression, ya hear? Applejack ain't *that kind* of mare, unnerstand sugarcube?"

Rarity blinked, somewhat stunned. "I.. I think I do, Applejack..." her anger at Rainbow Dash had now completely drained away.

"Good! Well, I hafta get back to the farm," Applejack reached under her hat and dropped a large, pale flower from it. "This, uh, this is for Rainbow Dash, if you see her. Thanks a bunch, Rarity!" said the farmer, dashing away.

Rarity stood in silence for a couple of minutes, before picking up the flower and heading back inside, making her way to the kitchen. "Rainbow Dash?" she ventured, her voice soft.

"..."

Rarity stepped closer to the cabinet. "Come on out of there Rainbow Dash, please."

"Go away." came the muffled reply.

With a sigh, Rarity used her magic to open the cabinet and floated Rainbow Dash out and back down to the floor. "I want to apologize Rainbow Dash, it was *not* my place to assume such things from a loyal pony such as yourself."

"Yeah yeah..." Rainbow Dash waved her hoof dismissively, "Don't get your saddles in a bunch over it." the airmare looked at the floor, her face unreadable.

Rarity stepped closer to the crestfallen pegasus, placing her chin on the cyan pony's rainbow mane. "Oh Rainbow Dash, there will be others- please don't let this-"

Rainbow Dash moved away from Rarity's comforting gesture. "Don't, Rare." the pegasus tried swallowing the lump in the back of her throat, to no avail. "Applejack had her fun, and that's all it was- a night of fun, and now everything goes back to normal, *because she's not that kind of mare.*" the pony rambled, fighting back the tears. "Besides, I'm gonna be a Wonderbolt! I don't need some smooth-talking Element of *Dishonesty* tyin' me down and crampin' my style!" her wings flapped unconsciously, her eyes loosing long held-back tears.

The designer unicorn was close to tears herself, until she remembered Applejack's present. This was it! "Rainbow Dash, honey..." Rarity gave some thought as to how to present the farmer's gesture. '*Appeal to her ego, of course!*' the flower floated magically to Rainbow Dash's line of sight. "Perhaps you are getting ahead of yourself, Rainbow Dash."

Rainbow Dash looked at the beautiful, pale flower. '*... An apple blossom...*'

"Rainbow Dash, not everypony is as *gallant* and *fearless* as you are- why, us *normal* ponies can barely get up in the morning we're so scared of every little thing!" Using one of her own manepins, Rarity clipped the flower to Rainbow Dash's mane, behind her right ear. "Perhaps Applejack left you this- the gift of hope- because she is a scared little filly, looking for *somepony* to give her the courage to be as passionate and open with her feelings as *you* are!"

Rainbow Dash's eyes were wide now, a slight blush on her face. "... Give her courage?"

Rarity gave the pegasus a warm, honest smile. "Well of *course*, Rainbow Dash- why, just a single *one* of your feathers contains more courage in it than the entirety of the Royal Guard army!"

Rainbow Dash's wings were now at full spread, her posture straight and imposing. "Yeah... Yeah! You know what, Rarity? You're *totally* right!" the pegasus stamped her hoof, ego thoroughly stroked. "Oh I'm gonna courage that filly so hard she won't be able to tell an apple from a carrot!"

"That's the spirit!" Rarity was glad that she was able to cheer up the colorful pony.

Stepping up to the seamstress, Rainbow Dash threw her forelegs around Rarity's neck, giving her a big hug. Rarity hugged the pegasus back, and even Spike and Pinkie Pie joined in and hugged them both. "Thanks a lot, you guys." Rainbow Dash said, tightening the hug.

The hug quickly dispersed, everyone involved yelping in surprise at the inclusion of the mistress of ceremonies herself.

"Pinkie Pie?!" Rainbow Dash was first to react. "What're *you* doing here?" Spike and Rarity both nodded, wondering the same thing.

"I'm here for the party, DUH!" the pink pony hopped in place.

Rarity blinked. "I'm sorry dear, but *who* told you we were holding a party?"

"Well it was OBVIOUS- you think you can sneak a party on ol' Pinkie *twice*?" Pinkie Pie brought up her fore hooves, tapping one against the other, counting off *as if she had fingers*. "First Applejack asked me to find Rainbow Dash, and then one of those cool weather ponies asked me to find Rainbow Dash, and then that funny-looking mailpony was asking where Rainbow Dash was, and then the Mayor was asking about Rainbow Dash, and then even Fluttershy and then ohmygosh I realized what this is!" Pinkie Pie flailed, "It's a SEARCH PARTY!" with her scream came a rain of confetti, seemingly out of nowhere. Pinkie Pie interpreted the stunned silence of her audience as sheer excitement for the festivities to come. "Sooooooooo I followed this really awesome rainbow streak in the sky that lead directly to Library because whenever you SEE an awesome rainbow streak in the sky it usually MEANS that an awesome Rainbow Dash is IN that sky, streaking rainbows awesomely!"

Rarity facehooved, the gesture imitated by the purple dragon standing next to her. "Well I guess that explains how *everypony* decided to look for you here, Rainbow Dash."

The pegasus blushed slightly. "Eheh... I guess I don't know my own speed..."

Already in the kitchen preparing to bake a cake, Pinkie Pie turned back to her party guests. "Aaaand why *else* would everypony be at Twilight's house *unless* you were holding a party?"

"Actually, *yeah*, where *is* Twilight?" Rainbow Dash asked, only now realizing that the Alpha Nerd was not among them.

Rarity chuckled. "Oh, did you not know? *I* am house-sitting for Twilight Sparkle, seeing as our bookish filly has finally snagged a handsome, *filthy-rich* stallion from Manehattan! They are probably out on a wonderful, expensive and *luxurious* date as we speak!"

"What?!" Rainbow Dash was skeptical, to say the least.

"But Rarity, that's not right at all!" Spike said, tugging at the indigo-maned pony's tail. "The one that sent for Twilight was Trixie!" he explained.

"***WHAT?!***" Rarity felt a *conniption* coming on. "That... that *hussy* is taking *our* Twilight out on a wonderful, expensive and *luxurious* date as we speak?!"

Spike facepalmed at the scene that was unfolding. "No! No, guys, it's something legal!" he waved his arms, trying to get the riled-up ponies' attention. "It's some copyright thing or *something*, I think."

"***WHAT?!***" Rarity felt her *conniption* turning into rage. "That... that *charlatan* is ***suing*** our Twilight?!"

"OhmygoshohmygoshOHMYGOSH! We gotta help her!" Rainbow Dash flapped her wings in her unrest, floating a few feet off the floor. "She could go to jail! You have no idea what they *do* to ponies like *her* in jail!"

"Guys..." Spike tried, to no avail, to clarify the situation. Then again, he didn't trust Trixie either, she *could* be suing Twilight eight ways til Sunday.

"Rainbow Dash!" Rarity stamped her hoof, "Twilight left only a couple of hours ago! You're the fastest- go get Applejack and get moving to Manehattan- *I* will find Fluttershy and see if I can find a sitter for the Cutie Marks Crusaders!"

Rainbow Dash saluted. "Right!" she said before immediately deflating, "But how am I gonna find her?"

Pinkie Pie ducked away from the fridge, "Well she's at the Clydesler Building, silly!" she answered, quickly ducking back in to look for more ingredients and handing them to Apple Bloom.

"We don't need a sitter!" Scootaloo complained, dropping the ladle she was using to mix the batter. "We can help too!"

"Yeah! CUTIE MARK CRUSADERS: PROFESSIONAL LEGAL COUNSEL: JUSTICE FOR ALL!" cheered Apple Bloom, Sweetie Belle, and Pinkie Pie, all covered in cake mix.

"Absolutely not!"

- - -

Big Macintosh had been watching his sister work all day. A colt of few words, he hadn't had the heart to mention just how *terrible* her apple-bucking had been since she came back from last night's party. Besides, pointing out the obvious would only serve to frustrate the powerful kicker even more, something Big Macintosh was very keen to avoid.

"Doggone apples!" complained Applejack, grunting in aggravation. "Why won't y'all *fall* right?!"

"Sis, Ah reckon yer heart's not innit today..." drawled the stallion, "Maybe you oughta go back to bed for'a while."

Ears pointed back, Applejack stared fiercely at her brother. "Now what're you *implyin'*? 'Coz I can work *just fine*, Big Mac! In fact, I-"

"YOINK!"

Applejack's words caught in her mouth, as a transonic rainbow streak nearly lopped her head off, passing within millimeters of her ears, creating a vacuum that almost knocked her over. "What the..." Applejack realized her hat was missing, and turned to watch the familiar blue blur rocket away, clouds

parting in her way. The farmer felt a surge in her heart, “Oh so you want me to *chase ya*, huh, Hot-Sauce?” she chuckled.

Turning back to her brother and wearing a determined face, Applejack scraped the ground with her hoof, rarin' to go. “Big Mac, Ah think Ah *will* take a rest from apple-buckin'- 'coz Ah reckon Ah gotta *take back what's MINE!*”

“Eeyup.” Big Macintosh nodded, watching his sister speed off, chasing after the rainbow.

- - -

It didn't take long for the Fastest Pegasus in Equestria to arrive at the lobby of the Clydesler Building. What the Fastest Pegasus in Equestria wasn't expecting though, was the wall of security ponies that seemed determined not to let just any random, unidentified pony into the building. Rainbow Dash grinned smugly- being the Fastest Pegasus in Equestria didn't just mean the fastest flier... it also meant the quickest *thinker!*

- - -

Twilight Sparkle looked around the large, fancy wooden table of the even larger, fancier meeting room she was in. She was seated at one end of the rectangular table, with Miss Spelling and The Great and Powerful Trixie seated closest to her, followed by a large number of frankly grumpy-looking businessponies, all silently staring back at her. She and Trixie had lost track of time at the penthouse, and had arrived at the meeting an hour later.

Looking down at the 60-page contract in front of her, the lavender unicorn felt more than a bit intimidated by the entire situation. Using her magic, Twilight levitated one of the glasses of water that had been brought in by a secretary, and brought it to her lips. *'I wish my friends were here...'*

“Miss Spelling?” crackled one of the intercoms on the table.

The orange pony looked at the intercom with disdain as she clicked the comm button. “We are currently in a very important meeting, this *better* be urgent.”

“It's about Ms. Sparkle- Her lawyer is here. Miss Rainbow Dash The Second, Esquire?”

Twilight choked and spat out the gulp of water she had been drinking, unintentionally spraying Trixie's face for the second time that day.

Chapter 5

Counselor Dash has the Stand

The elevator ascended slowly; *painfully* so for Rainbow Dash. It didn't help that the stupid thing was stopping at every other floor for everypony and their mom to get in or out. Rainbow Dash tapped her front hoof impatiently, exhaling a sigh upwards and flitting her colorful locks. She glared at the security pony that was escorting her through the building and to the meeting room- the lazy colt had balked at Rainbow Dash's request of just running up the seventy or so flights of stairs to where Twilight was probably getting sued for all she was worth. Probably more.

Rainbow Dash frowned; so many months ago Twilight had stopped the pegasus from chasing after Trixie and giving her a well-deserved thrashing for making her friends look stupid in front of Ponyville. *'Shoulda let me do it!'* Twilight had actually believed that Trixie would eventually come back after having realized her mistakes, apologize, and then they would become friends and write to Princess Celestia together about it. *'For a nerd you're not that smart, are ya, Twi?'*

Of course, when *that* didn't happen, the stubborn unicorn had started letting her mind run with thoughts of what *might* have happened to Trixie, and it wasn't long before she'd worried herself into personally searching for the azure mare. Rainbow Dash rolled her eyes; against her better judgment, she had acted as Twilight's eyes in the sky during those searches, even as she continued to complain to the worried unicorn that the faker was not worth the effort. Rainbow Dash sighed, *'Once you set your mind to something...'* she recalled how *compelled* Twilight was to find out what made Pinkie Pie tick.

Rainbow Dash realized that her escort had stepped out of the elevator and was holding the door open for her. Spotting a '75' printed on a black plate on the metal frame surrounding the door, Rainbow Dash stepped out of the elevator and followed the lazy colt guard as he lead her down a fancy hallway. *'Don't worry Twi... **Nopony** messes with my friends- 'specially not The Lame and Stupid-Face Trixie!'*

The guard came to a stop and directed the rainbow-maned pegasus into a spacious lobby occupied by a single pegasus mare, a secretary sitting at her desk next to a large double door. Rainbow Dash licked her lips and pressed

down on Applejack's hat, tilting it slightly to her left so as not to damage the pale flower still pinned to her mane. "Showtime!"

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Twilight Sparkle was deeply regretting her refusal to partake upon The Great and Powerful Trixie's vast collection of spirits; she could really use a drink right now. *'Does that make me an alcoholic? Oh Celestia, as if I didn't have enough things to worry about now!'* The unicorn lowered her head a little, willing herself not to hyperventilate. She looked to her right, where a now-dry Trixie sat in silence, simmering with barely-contained ire. Twilight's ears drooped, *'How are we ever gonna become friends at this rate?'*

Looking around the room once more, Twilight could hardly conceal the dread that was chilling her to the bone. The meeting room was unnecessarily big, and just as ostentatious as the rest of the building. The heavy, agarwood table took up minimal space set in the middle of the luxurious corner office. The location afforded the room with two windowed walls, providing an expansive view of the Manehattan skyline, a rainbow streak cutting right through the mostly-gray horizon of buildings. *'We are definitely not in Ponyville anymore...'* she thought, glancing at the dour, dull-colored, unhappy businessponies that she supposed were judging her every living second; their silence was stifling. *'And now Rainbow Dash is on her way here?'* the lavender pony brought both hooves to her face; this was not going to end well for her mental well-being.

As if on cue, the meeting room's large, oaken doors slammed open, the door handles chipping paint off of the walls, and startling most of the ponies gathered there. "Ma'am, I told you to please remain seated while I announ-"

Twilight's right eye twitched. *'Oh Celestia I hope that's not-'*

"Howdy, ya'll!" greeted Rainbow Dash, trotting into the room, her posture commanding and confident. "Rainbow Dash The Second, Esquire, at your service!" she bowed.

Twilight's left eye twitched. *'Oh Celestia she's wearing Applejack's hat why is she wearing Applejack's hat.'*

Completely ignoring the looks directed her way, Rainbow Dash made her way to stand at Twilight's side, before raising an eyebrow. *To stand.* "Huh." she

said plainly, before calmly trotting around the table, making passing comments to each businesspony she walked by. "Nice suit bro... Your mane looks funny... Does your mom dress ya?... Have we met?... Watch your tail, I almost tripped!... You can look but not touch, babe..."

With each comment, Twilight sunk just a bit lower in her seat, embarrassment settling in once more- though not nearly as deeply as it had settled during *the incident*. Twilight blinked. *'Aaaand now I'm thinking about THAT again.'*

Rainbow Dash finished her circuit around the table, glaring at Trixie as she passed her by. The colorful mare looked around the room, annoyance clear on her face at apparently not having found what she was looking for. "S'cuse me fillies, gentledudes." Rainbow Dash breezily flew out of the room.

All eyes turned to Twilight once more. Before anything could be said, a loud scraping noise filled the hall outside, the source quickly becoming apparent: with great effort, Rainbow Dash was using her head to push a large, extravagant sofa into the meeting room, Applejack's hat resting on the plush seat. A secretary behind her meekly pleaded with determined pegasus. "Uh, Miss, that's for the guests, Miss...!"

Rainbow Dash closed the double doors on the secretary and continued to push the sofa towards her client, the scraping sound piercing everypony's ears and at the same time ruining the carpet and marble tile underneath. Twilight Sparkle rubbed her temples, as her apparently permanent blush intensified. *'Okay, this is very nearly just as embarrassing as public premature casting now.'*

The acrobat pony stopped pushing as soon as she felt the sofa bump Twilight's chair. With a satisfied smile, Rainbow Dash picked up Applejack's hat and put it back on- and while completely ignoring the looks directed her way, Rainbow Dash took her seat at Twilight Sparkle's side. "Much better!" she exclaimed, making herself comfortable.

Miss Spelling- already on edge thanks to the mounting financial costs of Trixie's antics- was having a very, very hard time containing her anger. "Are you *quite* done-"

"OBJECTION!!" Rainbow Dash slammed her hooves on the table- one businesscolt loosed a girlish yelp as he fell out of his chair, his toupee landing a few feet away.

"WE ARE NOT IN COURT!" screamed Miss Spelling, standing on her chair, her chest heaving. Quickly realizing her loss of control, the mare sat down, straightened out her hair, and took a gulp of her glass of water. "Counselor Dash, *perhaps you have not been told what this meeting is about.*" she said through gritted teeth.

"Oh yeah? Well what's it to ya?" challenged Twilight's self-appointed attorney.

As her pegasus friend argued with Miss Spelling, a humiliated Twilight wanted nothing more than to teleport far, far away- in her mind, she toyed with the notion of perhaps warping to the moon; it's probably quite beautiful this time of year. At least all eyes were now on Rainbow Dash instead of herself, *or so she thought*; turning to her right, Twilight realized that The Great and Powerful Trixie was looking at *her*. Twilight's face reddened to a warm glow, her thoughts a mile a minute. *'Ohmygosh you're smiling at me why are you smiling at me?'* Twilight squinted. *'Wait... you're grinning... My embarrassment is funny to you?!'*

Twilight's mouth hung open indignantly upon her realization. *"This is not funny!"* she mouthed silently at the simpering azure mare.

The Great and Powerful Trixie was smirking from ear to ear. *"Oh yes it is!"* she mouthed back.

Twilight shook her head, *"Nuh-uh!"* the lavender bookworm was trying hard not to take part in Trixie's infectious smiling.

"Yah-huh!" Trixie nodded, finding Twilight's tiny, embarrassed smile terribly cute.

Twilight lightly kicked Trixie under the table as she continued her silent argument with the showmare, not caring that her own smile now mirrored Trixie's. *"It's not!"*

"Oh it's on, little filly!" Returning Twilight's kick, both magical mares became fully involved in their game of hoofsie. It took them all of *ten minutes* to realize that Rainbow Dash and Miss Spelling had stopped arguing quite a while ago and they, along with the rest of the table, were watching the playful unicorns with varying degrees of disdain or approval.

Twilight and Trixie wore matching, glowing blushes. Turning to her friend for support, Twilight came face-to-face with Rainbow Dash's insufferably

cheeky, smiling pucker, eyes full of mirth. “D'awwww!” the rainbow-maned wonder cooed, not being able to resist teasing her unicorn friend, even as she foaled around with *the enemy*.

Miss Spelling adjusted her glasses. “Ms. Sparkle, Ms. Trixie, are you two quite finished, or do you have any more delays planned for this meeting?” Receiving no answer from the mortified ponies, the orange unicorn continued. “Now, as I was *trying* to explain to Counselor Dash, Metro Goldmane Brayer Studios will be releasing to the public a motion picture based on an original story by Ms. Trixie.” Looking to her right, Miss Spelling watched as Rainbow Dash nodded while scribbling on a legal pad she had procured forcefully from the secretary. “Now, this original story is a semi-autobiographical account involving ponies, situations, and locations that Ms. Trixie has encountered- as seen through her eyes.”

Rainbow Dash and Twilight both had to roll their eyes at that last part. Looking at her friend, Twilight was less than pleased to see that Rainbow Dash wasn't taking notes as much as she was drawing Applejack all over one page.

Miss Spelling gave The Great and Powerful Trixie a meaningful glance before continuing. “As to why Ms. Sparkle's presence was required- the main conflict in this film involves the antagonistic dynamic between its two main characters, two unicorns based on Ms. Sparkle and Ms. Trixie. We at Metro Goldmane Brayer are prepared to compensate Ms. Sparkle for the use of her likeness in our production and its related products and advertisements.”

Rainbow Dash raised her hoof but Miss Spelling anticipated her question. “All the specifics are already detailed in the contract provided for Ms. Sparkle. Everything should be in order, seeing as this is a pretty standard consent form; all we need is her signature.”

Twilight looked down at the table, where the neigh-unreadable contract stared back at her with arcane legalese. She had *tried* reading through it, but its language was more mysterious than any ancient tome she had ever perused in her life. Really, she was about to sign the thing anyways, figuring her character's part in Trixie's movie was minuscule at best. Despite what Miss Spelling may be claiming, The Great and Powerful Trixie was not the kind of pony to give equal billing to anypony so easily- whenever this movie got around to getting made, Twilight fully expected her character to be on screen for all of ten seconds before being crushed, eaten, or crush-eaten by an Ursa Major. “Right then...”

“Wait a sec, Twi!” Rainbow Dash stopped the unicorn from reaching for the nearby pen. “You gotta let me look at the contract before you sign it, dude!”

Twilight regarded Rainbow Dash with a questioning look. *‘I suppose it would make sense, if we’re gonna keep up this farce...’* Twilight nodded. “Right, right... How could I forget my legal counsel, after I called you all the way over here?” she chuckled nervously. The unicorn handed her friend the large stack of papers.

‘Is she speed-reading?’ Miss Spelling sighed as she watched Rainbow Dash apparently skim over the entire contract in less than five minutes. “I suppose we could take an hour’s recess for Counselor Dash to review the conditions of the contract, but I would like to advise the Counselor that time is money, and we cannot simply halt production so that she can nitpick numbers on what is an industry-standard contract.”

‘Oh no...’ Cringed Twilight, closing her eyes.

Rainbow Dash’s wings spread menacingly. “An hour?! You callin’ me *slow*, Four-Eyes?”

“Four-eyes?!”

“Yeah, you heard me, *Butt-Face!*”

Miss Spelling’s horn glowed dangerously. “*Counselor Dash*, please behave yourself!”

Rainbow Dash beat her wings and hopped up on the table, glowering at Miss Spelling. “Hah! You gonna sprinkle your unicorn pixie dust on me, Four-Butt-Eyes-Face?! *Try it, see what happens.*”

Twilight Sparkle stood up from her chair brusquely, knocking it to the floor. “DASH! What’s gotten into you? Stop t-” The unicorn’s words caught in her throat as soon as the cyan pegasus turned back to face her.

Rainbow Dash’s face, her eyes, her stance- she wasn’t out of control- her confident gaze pierced through Twilight’s own with a clear intent. *‘Trust me.’* The exchange was not lost on Trixie.

Breathing and finding her center, Miss Spelling relaxed and removed her glasses, floating a napkin to clean them. "Please don't make me call Security, Counselor Dash. Return to your seat."

The pegasus turned right back to the orange unicorn. "Go ahead and call 'em! Maybe they can help you take this bogus contract and *shove it!*" A chorus of whispered gasps from the businessponies followed Rainbow Dash's outburst. "Twi, these *chumps* are trying to play *you* for a chump!" The pegasus shoved her hoof accusingly into Miss Spelling's chest. "Trixie and Four-Eyes didn't bring these goons here as lawyers! Ya think / don't know a group of bullies when I see one?"

The Great and Powerful Trixie stood up from her own chair, about to complain. "Trixie did *not* bri-

Rainbow Dash continued, ignoring Trixie. "These suits are here to *scare* ya into signing the contract! You don't *need* 20 ponies to witness the signing! And where's the script for the movie? Were you just gonna sign your name away and let them write *whatever* about you?"

Twilight stared at Rainbow Dash in surprise and admiration. She had been having an *emotional* day, to say the least- so much so that she had not had the presence of mind to actually question *anything* about this whole mess. Twilight felt disappointed in herself for not having fully analyzed and deconstructed the situation the moment she got to Manehattan. Right then, the unicorn came to the same painful conclusion the pegasus was just arriving to.

"You've got them by the docks, Twi!" many tails twitched at Rainbow Dash's declaration, "You got all the power here- they can't start making the film without your permission, so why're they trying to force you to sign *right now*? Unless they're *totally* hidin' something from ya- go ahead, ask Trixie *the Rat!*" Rainbow Dash spun around to point accusingly at the mare magician.

The Great and Powerful Trixie looked *incensed*. "Trixie is *not*-"

"Trixie." the showmare's heart sunk when she heard Twilight's tone. "Trixie, have you been lying to me?"

The Great and Powerful Trixie had never felt as meager and powerless as she did at that moment. Try as she might, Trixie could not get her words out- she was trying hard to say something, *anything* to stop Twilight from looking at her like *that*, but her throat and vocal chords were currently refusing to

cooperate and let any lie through. The showmare could only see abject disappointment and betrayal in Twilight's bright, purple eyes. Her bright, teary eyes. *'Well done you stupid mare, you made her cry.'* Trixie reached tentatively for the lavender unicorn. "Twilight, Trixie is-

Twilight flinched away from Trixie. "Dash was right about you. *Everypony* was right about you." she spat out poisonously, before disappearing in a sparkle of magic.

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Though something of an usual sight nowadays, the denizens of Ponyville had to hand it to six special ponies for always coming up with ways to provide shock and awe to the sleepy town nearly every afternoon. Lining the streets, the crowds watched with confused wonder at the sight- down Main Street and coming from the east, a purple baby dragon ran as fast as he could, pulling behind him a large hot air balloon that was barely floating off the ground. From the west on the same street were three ponies heading straight for the balloon, seemingly with great urgency.

In front of the pack and leading the charge, Ponyville's pioneer dressmaker galloped, looking meticulously and perfectly coiffed as well as gallant and heroic, a sword and shield slung against her back, and a halberd tip on her horn shining in the sun. Behind the seamstress, Ponyville's Premier Pink Party Pony hopped airily and happily, easily keeping up with the leader of the pack. Bringing up the rear, Ponyville's most celebrated drinker as of last night half-galloped, half-fluttered, struggling to keep up with her friends' haste.

"Oh no!" cried the pink earth pony, suddenly changing expressions.

Rarity looked back at Pinkie Pie, never breaking stride. "What it is, dear? Is something the matter?"

"They made Twilight cry!" whimpered the party pony, settling into a gallop.

Rarity didn't have time to reply- Fluttershy had quickly picked her and Pinkie Pie off of the ground, and flapped speedily towards Twilight's balloon. The unicorn's eyes widened for a second, spotting the angry look the meek pegasus carried on her face.

“Um, please hurry, Spike.” Fluttershy requested as she deposited her friends into the pink wicker basket.

“You don't have to tell *me* twice, Fluttershy!” the young dragon quickly made his way to the throat of the balloon's envelope, plopping down on a small seat attached to it. Without hesitation, Spike started breathing fire into the envelope, quickly heating up the air inside and causing the aircraft to lift off. Fluttershy stayed outside of the basket, holding onto it with her forelegs as she flapped her wings to give the balloon some forward propulsion, her friends cheering her on.

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Miss Spelling was having a bad day, *undeniably*. The meeting, after *finally* getting started, had very quickly spiraled out of control. The Great and Powerful Trixie's most amazing act of magic, the orange mare concluded, was the way she could make massive sums of money just *disappear* from Metro Goldmane Brayer's bank account on a daily basis, *just by being herself*. It was a mathematical wonder to witness how, with the addition of two acquaintances, Trixie had managed to *exponentially* increase her staggering cost to the studio in the space of four hours.

Miss Spelling was not pleased. She was not pleased with a *lot* of things, actually. First and foremost, the colorful but astute attorney had been entirely right and justified in her rant. The studio had asked Spelling to settle this matter cleanly and *quickly*, and against her better judgment, she had tried to do so. It did not *please* Miss Spelling, but it was her job, after all. This was the second thing the bespectacled unicorn was not pleased with, *her job*.

'Not that it matters, now.' The red-maned mare had already taken a risk by pushing so hard for this movie to get made against the wishes of most of the shareholders. She had started digging her grave by vying to give the unicorn magician complete creative control of the project. She had continued to dig herself deeper by bankrolling The Great and Powerful Trixie's very public, very controversial public persona. And now, in front of the entire (useless) Metro Goldmane Brayer legal team, she had *spectacularly* failed to settle a potential and potentially-costly lawsuit-in-the-making.

Miss Spelling magically brought a napkin to herself, compulsively cleaning her already-clean glasses. *'Lawsuit or not, and whether the movie is released or*

not, my rump is fired.' The orange unicorn blinked in enlightenment as that thought settled in.

"ALRIGHT!" she shouted, getting everypony's attention. "I want *everypony* but Ms. Trixie and Counselor Dash *OUT OF THIS OFFICE!*"

Trixie and Rainbow Dash both looked up from where they had been scuffling on the floor after Twilight had teleported away. Trixie had been angry at herself and at the pegasus, and had quickly thrown herself at Rainbow Dash, who was more than happy to oblige the request to throw down.

"**NOW!!**" yelled the orange unicorn, magically pulling the chairs out from under every businesspony gathered there. Miss Spelling smiled as she watched the herd of pettifoggers trot out of the meeting room with haste. Turning back to the blue ponies still on the floor, she adjusted her glasses.

Miss Spelling felt *liberated*. She was going to be fired either way, so it was time to do things right, starting with *the truth*.

"Counselor Dash, I... *Metro Goldmane Brayer* is prepared to make *any* changes you deem necessary to your client's contract. Please, *do not* be shy about what you believe your client rightfully deserves." Motioning to the sofa Rainbow Dash had helped herself to, she continued. "We seem to have gotten off on the wrong hoof- perhaps I am to blame for that. May I speak candidly with you? I believe there are some things you must know about this production..." Miss Spelling's smile was bright and cheery...

...which kinda creeped Rainbow Dash out.

Chapter 6

And She Ran So Far Away

As Celestia's sun began its descent below the horizon, the rainbow streak that divided the heavens between Ponyville and Manehattan began diffusing softly into the evening sky, slowly losing its source of light. The mysterious, long-lasting weather phenomenon had baffled the citizens of the big city- this rainbow was not related to any precipitation; the sky had been clear all day, and neither was the streak manufactured by the famous Cloudsdale Rainworks- this rainbow was a band of condensed water particles. It was natural, but it was deliberately drawn across the sky.

Crowds of curious onlookers had followed the rainbow all the way to the Clydesler Building Plaza, where the streak ended abruptly into the cracked pavement. Holly Diver had actually gotten a glimpse of the pony responsible for this, but she found the spectacle and speculation of the crowd to be quite entertaining, so she kept her silence as she flew over the gathered ponies before making her way to the lobby of the building.

Once inside the building, Holly lazily greeted one of the many security ponies stationed to the lobby. "Hey, Daze." she waved.

"Hey Diver, how are- huhwhat?" Daze did a double take as soon as he turned to greet the dark pegasus.

Holly Diver stopped and raised an eyebrow at the guard. "Yes?" Following his gaze, she realized what might be troubling the lazy colt. "Oh. These." she looked at herself, at least two-dozen cameras slung around her neck, back, and forelegs. "I like cameras." she said plainly, before continuing her trot to the elevators.

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Rainbow Dash was quite comfortable on her purloined sofa, resting on her back, head over the armrest as she held a large stack of papers over her face. Kicking her hind legs and using the momentum to sit upright, she glared

disbelievingly at The Great and Powerful Trixie. "Ok, ok hold up. *You* wrote this? For reals?"

Trixie glared at the pegasus, blush bright on her face. "Trixie wrote it, yes. *Why?*" she asked from her seat, three chairs away from Rainbow Dash's sofa.

Rainbow Dash looked back down to the script in her hooves. *The Brave and Beautiful Glitter Dawn*. "Whadda ya mean, 'Why'? *Have you read this?*" Asked the pegasus, tapping the papers with her hoof.

The unicorn mare really didn't need this right now. "Trixie wonders if the rainbow trout has a point to make..." she commented, turning away from the cyan mare.

Rainbow Dash dropped the script on the table as she slowly stood up from her sofa. "You wanna come over here and say that *again?*"

"Ladies, please." Miss Spelling adjusted her glasses. "Counselor Dash, I know you are upset, but your anger is misplaced upon Ms. Trixie, insufferable as she may be at times."

"H-hey!"

The pegasus took the air, as it were. "But she lied to everypony!" Rainbow Dash hovered slightly over the table, unable to keep still in her seat.

Miss Spelling placed a hoof on top of the script, lest it blow away in the attorney's down-wash. "It was a terribly foalish, frankly idiotic thing she did, but I believe her reason for doing so was quite clearly out of cowardice, not outright malice."

"Well duh! I mean, I just *read the thing*." Rainbow Dash rolled her eyes as she crossed her front hooves over her chest.

The azure mare's eyes twitched. "*Trixie is STILL in the room would you PLEASE stop talking about her as if she were NOT.*"

Still in stationary flight, Rainbow Dash descended slightly to pick up the movie's script, before flipping it open. "Oh, I'm *sorry*," began the floating pegasus, "Does 'The Mighty and Fearsome *Pixie*' have somethin' to say?"

Miss Spelling watched as Trixie turned as red as a ripe Sweet Apple Acres apple. "Counselor Dash," the orange mare began, raising an eyebrow. "I would have expected *you* of all ponies to be more sympathetic to Ms. Trixie's... cause for concern." Using her magic, Miss Spelling floated Rainbow Dash's legal pad into the air, displaying it for everypony present.

"HAH!" chortled Holly Diver, having just come into the room.

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"Dangit dangit dangit!" Applejack cursed as the rainbow streak she had been following for the past two hours finally dissipated completely. She had entered the city limits 10 minutes ago and was still galloping at full tilt, the rumbling of her forceful sprint fracturing windows and overturning sidewalk tables at every outdoor establishment she dashed by. The farmer poured more effort into her gallop, figuring she had to be close to her destination- as far as she could tell, Rainbow Dash had flown a nearly straight line all the time; Applejack hoped that the pegasus's landing spot would be obvious enough if she just kept running down the sidewalk of the street she was currently stampeding.

At her current speed and current mindset, everything not directly ahead of her seemed to pass by as a blur. The colors of the city and the colors of its citizens all seemed to mesh into dithering blotches of gray and other muted shades. Except for one swath of bright lavender and deep blue, *'Shoot! I'd know that purple hide anywhere!'*

Coming to a screeching halt that startled many horse-drawn carriages into running into each other, Applejack doubled back and quickly caught up to Twilight Sparkle, who was dispiritedly pacing down the opposite sidewalk from the farmer, head hung low. The earth pony quickly and haphazardly crossed the street, causing another carriage pile-up. "Sugarcube! What's goin' on, hun?"

Twilight turned to the farmer, lip quivering. "Apple...jack? Oh, Applejaaaaaack!" the unicorn let loose the waterworks, quickly drenching Applejack in a teary hug.

Applejack was momentarily stunned- that was *not* the reaction she expected from her book-learned friend. "Uh, Twi...? Is sumthin' the matter?" at

that, Twilight proceeded to cry even harder into the orange pony's mane.
“Huuokaaay....”

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NYPD officer Bobby Flat-Hoof stifled a yawn as he watched the knife nut being hauled away; it had been a *long* day for him and the rest of the New Yoke City police ponies in Manehattan.

The dark blue earth pony *hated* working overtime. Now, there was *always* something going on in a bustling city like Manehattan, that much was true... But *today*, today was just plain *strange*. Flat-Hoof had started his shift very early in the morning, working the beat uptown. Everything had been pretty normal- up until lunch time, it had been an average, even *boring* day in Manehattan, so much so that he'd stayed at the doughnut shop for a bit longer past his lunch hour.

A couple of hours later, the reports started piling in. *Public indecency. Immoral Acts being performed on the streets.* Flat-Hoof rolled his eyes; many of the calls had been from older ponies, one of them claiming that *-this was the crumbling of the morals of Equestria, by way of that rotten, flithy, dirty, lewd, lascivious JUNK called Rock n' Roll -* A report that Flat-Hoof planned to make a copy of and frame once he got back to the station.

Flat-Hoof and his partner Gummie Horseshoe had made the trip to the downtown area, specifically the Clydesler Building Plaza, only to find a whole lot of nothing going on. A few other patrolponies had gotten to the scene first, and were interviewing some of the witnesses. Apparently, *none* of them had seen anything happen, *even the ones that reported the incident.*

The trip wasted, Flat-Hoof and Horseshoe returned to the station only to be dispatched once again, downtown *once again*. The reports came from all over the city this time- a strange rainbow-colored beam of light shot straight through the city. The worried citizens had claimed this to be either a secret Canterlot super-weapon, the end of the world, or the work of “human-lifeforms”, the nickname given by conspiracy theorists to the mythological “extra-Equestrians” of legend.

Though pretty to look at, it turned out to be a form of naturally occurring rainbow, albeit strangely *linear* compared to most. Trip wasted, once more.

Horseshoe had made her annoyance clear during the walk back to the station; Flat-Hoof could only nod at his partner's mounting frustration about the lack of action. One hour later, *action!*

Or so they thought. *Clearly* something had taken place. A large number of Manehattan's finest had been called uptown after reports of a rampaging beast started coming in. One storekeeper flailed tearfully, claiming that the powerful monster, apparently hidden in a dust cloud, had ruined his life and probably killed millions. Flat-Hoof looked at the single, 5-inch crack running along a corner of the store's glass window and decided that this particular witness would not be questioned again.

More distressing and equally baffling had been the 89-carriage pile-up along the same street. Apparently caused by the same massive behemoth that had knocked down some tables and ruined some glass, this vehicular disaster was going to be a complete logistics nightmare to untangle. Fortunately for Flat-Hoof and Horseshoe, they were called away from traffic duty by the strangest report yet: a hot-air balloon had come in low through the streets, propelled by a pegasus and powered by a miniature dragon, of all things. Now, a hot-air balloon around the city- that would be a novelty, but nothing to really call the cops over. No, what that balloon was carrying, *that* was the reason for concern; both partners had broken into a gallop.

As they neared the scene of the incident, another patrolpony galloped up to them with the bad news: Flat-Hoof and Horseshoe had been late to the action once again- and they had missed a doozy this time! *Allegedly*, the balloon had deposited a young, pretty unicorn armed to the teeth right there at Clydesler Building Plaza. The crazy unicorn had then waltzed right into the lobby and demanded she be let in to see her friends- at which point building security decided to *subdue* her. She took out 15 security ponies before they finally got her under control.

Flat-Hoof had to chuckle as Horseshoe loosed a string of curses; they had run up and down the entire city for hours on end, and they had nothing to show for it. NYPD officer Bobby Flat-Hoof stifled a yawn as he watched the knife nut being hauled away; it had been a *long* day for him and the rest of the New Yoke City police ponies in Manehattan.

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Applejack sat at the table, picking at the remains of a half-eaten bowl of wild-flower pasta. She had correctly assumed that some food would calm down the distraught unicorn sitting across from her. What she *hadn't* counted on was the *amount* needed to do so. The farmer was worried this meal might overshoot her current financial state by quite a sum- especially after last night, when she had bet most of her pocket money against Fluttershy in her drink smackdown versus Big Mac.

"Thanks, AJ... With all that's happened today, I had forgotten I hadn't eaten anything since yesterday..." Twilight Sparkle heaved a contented sigh, stacking her empty bowl on top of the other nine, and next to the 4 rounds of beer she had already been treated to.

Applejack smiled at the unicorn. "Shucks Twi, you don't have to thank me none, I'm just glad yer not bawlin' yer eyes out anymore... I'm just no good at all that mushy stuff."

Twilight blushed. "I apologize for that... It's been a very trying day for me, Applejack... But what about *you*? What brings you to the city?"

It was Applejack's turn to blush. "A rainbow." she answered coyly, watching Twilight's expression. The earth pony quickly realized that her unicorn friend was not picking up on the obvious hint. "Rainbow Dash, Sugarcube. Ah was chasin' down that mangy pegasus when Ah ran into you." Applejack decided to let Twilight get away with the change of topic for now.

The unicorn in question blinked as the gears in her mind worked. "But Rainbow Dash's been in town for at least two hours now..."

"I'm just a humble earth pony, hun; Ah ain't got no fancy-shmancy wings, just mah Sun-given legs to carry me wher'ver I need to go."

"AJ!" Twilight raised her voice, "You ran *all the way from Ponyville*?"

The marathon pony smiled. "Shore did! Non-stop express to the end of the rainbow!"

"That's incredible, Applejack! But... Why? Did something happen to Rainbow Dash? Cause she seemed fine to me..."

"Exactly!" Applejack winked at Twilight, "You don't let a fine filly like that just go, 'specially not after you fin'ly caught 'er!" the farmer was blushing deeply now, but it felt good to be honest after hiding it for so long from her friends.

Twilight tilted her head. "Uh, caught her?" the unicorn's brain density was detrimental, at times.

Applejack facehoofed. With a sigh, she waved over the waiter and asked for two more beers. "How do Ah put this real delicate-like?" she asked herself, bringing a hoof to her chin. "Oh, Ah know! It's just like you and that purty snake-in-the-grass!"

"S-snake...?" the unicorn shuddered.

Applejack nodded, "Yeh, you know, that magic-snake-oil salesmare!"

Twilight flinched. "Snake-oil...?"

Applejack shrugged. "C'mon Twi, that slitherin', belly-draggin' -"

"*AJ!*" hissed the unicorn, shivering slightly. "Will you *please* stop talking about s-snakes?!"

The farmer chuckled sheepishly. "I'm sorry Sug, Ah reckon I'm still a mite sore at Trixie even after all this time."

Twilight visibly slumped. "...Trixie?"

"Right, Ah dunno if it were some big secret you thought you was hidin', but let's just say I'm not the *only* filly runnin' marathons for love, ain't that right Sugarcube?" Applejack took a sip of her beer. "Ah bet you never realized how long you were out walkin' whenever you went on one o' yer Trixie Hunts. It was *hours*, almost entire *days* at a time, Twi." The farmer smiled cheerily.

If Twilight had ever wondered how slack her jaw could go, she needn't anymore. Luminescent blush permeating her whole body, she could only stare at Applejack as her bright purple eyes became minuscule black dots and her hair became slightly frazzled.

Applejack found Twilight's expression quite funny. "Now don' go freakin' out on me Twilight- just because we ain't all chummy with Trixie it don't mean we're gonna give ya a hard time about it; we're yer friends, afterall." Applejack

thanked the waiter as he brought them another round of beers. "B'sides, you can't *choose* who ya'll fall for- *Ah should know!*" Applejack laughed at herself, opening the bottle with her teeth.

The orange earth pony finished her beer in one gulp. Wiping her lips, she pointed the empty bottle at herself. "Pers'nally, other than needin' a attitude readjustment, Ah don't think the filly's a half-bad pony- Ah mean, she *did* stand up to that there Ursa critter when she coulda just as easily turned tail and let it eat ev'rypony... An' *that*," Applejack opened the second beer bottle and placed it in front of Twilight, "...is just the right kinda foolhardy, idiotic disregard for pers'nal safety in the face of danger that an Element o' Harmony *prides* herself in!" the young business owner leaned back into her seat. "Ah think she'd fit right in... *Ya know*, whenever you git to *catching her*."

Twilight was now sure that it was *indeed* possible to die of embarrassment. She assumed that the feelings of confusion, fright, and mortification welling up within her were actually her internal organs shutting down one by one as all the blood within her body rushed to her face.

Applejack watched with wide eyes as Twilight Sparkle fainted, falling forward and running her horn into the table. "Uh. Twi...? Sugarcube?" the farmer poked the unconscious mare with her hoof.

"Aw colt, now I have to *carry* her?"

Applejack, still poking at Twilight, turned to face the complaint source. "S'cuse me?"

Rafale sighed. "You can come too, if you help me drag her back to the office."

"Whah...?" Applejack watched dumbstruck as the white pegasus dropped a large amount of bits on the table, then proceeded to haul up Twilight up over her back.

"Coming?"

Chapter 7

With Friends Like These

Flat-Hoof rubbed his tired eyes, watching the emergent Manehattan night-scene pass by his window; the colt really, really wanted to get home, but of course this day wasn't done with him yet. 'I didn't even **ask** if it could get any worse!' He had gotten the lovely opportunity to ride in the police carriage that was currently delivering the knife-nut back to the station; said perp was sitting across from him in the cabin's opposite seat, all chained up and closely guarded by his partner.

Now, for a pony that had been forcefully persuaded to stand down by around twenty guards armed with batons and mace, the white unicorn remained surprisingly conscious and absurdly fabulous-looking. Worst of all, her mouth was most certainly completely intact; Flat-Hoof knew this because the mare had taken the alternative to her right to remain silent.

The beautiful, hoof-cuffed mare was adamantly pleading her innocence, having- in a very short amount of time- voiced a staggering list of complaints against the security ponies, the police ponies, and some 'talent-less, unworthy trollop named Trixie'. According to 'Miss Rarity', as she called herself, the trollop in question was trying to sue and/or seduce one 'Twilight Sparkle', which had prompted the white unicorn's drastic course of action.

Horseshoe's bubblegum bubble popped loudly. "Right, and what better way to dish out vigilante justice than by cuttin' up the filly an' dumping her in the river? Sick nutjob." the shocking pink-maned mare held the sword in her hooves.

"**Excuse** me?!" Rarity tried turning her head, but the brace placed around her neck and horn held fast. "I would have done no such thing! Not that **you** would know," the unicorn turned her whole body and eyed the plainclothes cop with unabashed disdain, "but what you are holding in your gritty, unkempt hooves is most certainly the first ensemble of a new, cutting-edge Fashion Revolution that will sweep Equestria and make 'Miss Rarity' a household name-dare I say, more so than Princess Celestia herself!"

Horseshoe blinked and looked at her hooves, something that made Flat-Hoof chuckle. "Just what the he-"

“And aviators? Really Darling, I hope you are wearing those ironically. Then again, considering the rest of your ough, 'outfit', you clearly seem to be stuck permanently in an era most ponies would rather forget ever existed!”

The policemare's eyes widened as her bubble accidentally popped, covering her muzzle in gum. “WHAT.” Horseshoe glared at the criminal unicorn, and then at her partner, who seemed to be writhing in his seat, trying not to laugh.

Rarity watched with disgust as Horseshoe licked the gum back into her mouth. “And another thing, must you chew gum so loudly? It would behoove you to masticate with your muzzle closed- or are you deliberately trying to evoke that aura of frat-colt that you seem to be cultivating so well? Might I suggest an obnoxiously-colored cap, stylishly turned backwards and just slightly to the side?”

Watching the unflappable, infinitely-cool, Luna-may-care Detective Gummie Horseshoe become undone right before his eyes, Flat-Hoof had to admit that his less-than-pleasant day would at least end on a high note. 'Best. Perp. Ever!'

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“So you mind tellin' me where it is that we're takin' Twilight?” Applejack asked the white pegasus who was currently trotting ahead of her and had Twilight Sparkle, unconscious and drooling, slumped perpendicularly over her back.

Rafale shifted her shoulders a bit, trying to settle the unicorn in a more comfortable position; she didn't like having that weight over her wings. “I told you, we're going back to the office. The Captain said that Twilight still hasn't signed her movie deal.”

If Applejack had been wearing her hat, it would have most certainly popped right off her head. “Movie deal?! Twilight? Wha-huh-wut?”

The red-maned pony turned back to face Applejack. “Um yeah, haven't you noticed all the posters?” Rafale raised her hoof, pointing at a massive billboard on the side of an apartment building across from the street.

The image on display was a mostly-black picture with a lilac-colored unicorn in the center, heavily-shadowed by the light of her horn. The unicorn depicted had a black mane, her bangs cut straight, a shock of cerulean-blue and apple-red running down the length of it. 'OUR DARKEST NIGHT...' read the top left corner of the billboard, the slogan continuing at the bottom right corner, '...HER BRIGHTEST HOUR.'

Applejack's stare became wall-eyed for a few seconds. "That there filly's the spittin' image of this here Twilight!"

Rafale chuckled, recalling a scene from many months ago. "Yeah, Ms. Trixie was being a real nightmare during the casting... But after seeing the real Ms. Sparkle here, I can totally see why she was being so picky!"

Applejack's eyes derped once more. "Trixie?!"

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"Again, Counselor?" Miss Spelling raised an eyebrow, watching as the attorney's cowpony hat flipped off her head and hit the wall behind her for the second time in as many minutes.

"It's not me, dude! I swear that thing has a mind of its own!"

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Applejack rubbed her eyes as she continued trotting alongside the white pegasus. "Ok Sugarcube, yer gonna hafta explain all this real slow-like, 'cause I'm just a mite bit confused about ever'thing here..."

Rafale shrugged. "Well, I'm not actually involved in the movie directly..." she gave the farmer an apologetic look. "...I'm just security detail for Ms. Trixie, who's the writer and creative director for Ms. Sparkle's movie." Pausing momentarily to adjust the deadweight on her back once more, Rafale continued. "I don't actually know why they waited so long to bring Ms. Sparkle in- I mean, the movie's in post-production already... You'd think they would-of had her come in before shooting even started." The pegasus heaved a small sigh. "Now everypony's pulling their manes out, going crazy cause Ms. Sparkle hasn't signed her consent for the release! That's why I'm here, actually- the Captain told me to follow Ms. Sparkle and not let her leave the city without signing."

Applejack glared slightly. "Is that right?"

"Yup." Rafale produced a checkbook from her coat pocket. "Told me to use as much money as it took to get 'er to come back to the office."

"And if she don't want to sign yer papers?" Applejack was already setting her mind to the very real possibility of getting in a tussle with this pegasus to take back Twilight Sparkle.

Rafale blinked- she could see the farmer's muscles become taut under her skin. Her security training made it quite easy to read ponies, especially would-be aggressors- there were signs. Rafale could certainly take care of herself, but the sheer number of muscles unconsciously flexing under that apple-covered flank - many more than what she thought a pony actually had - led her to believe that a peaceful solution was worth pursuing. "W-well, I'm just bringing her back because she hasn't given us a Yes **OR** No. Once we get her answer, we won't be bothering Ms. Sparkle again."

"Ah see..." Applejack's jaw was hard-set, still not completely trusting the pegasus pony.

"Besides," Rafale winked at the orange pony, "The Captain told me to use as much money as it took to get 'er back- don't you dare make me use these blank checks on you, Missy!" she admonished with a smile.

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"Seriously?" asked the incredulous Rainbow Dash, feeling Applejack's hat fly off her head for a third time. Flying over to the other side of the meeting room, the cyan pegasus picked it up, and dug her hoof into the crown, pulling the drawstring tucked inside. "Never again!" she smiled, the hat now securely fastened to her head.

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"I see a black door and I want it painted pink/ Dull colors everywhere I want them to turn pink!/ I see the fillies trotting in their summer coats/ I have to turn my head away from this gray rote!"

Spike sighed as he walked down the sidewalk. "I can't believe it took us an hour and a half to find a parking spot!"

“I see a line of colts and they're all lookin' sad/ With cupcakes and some fun both'll make them very glad/ I see people turn their heads and quickly look this way/ Like a newborn foal parties happen every day!”

“Oh yes, and the parking rates were so frightfully expensive...” complained Fluttershy, wings drooping a bit.

“I wanna see it painted pink, painted pink!/ Pink as dawn, pink as rose/ I wanna have some fun, raining down from the sky/ I wanna see it painted, painted, painted pink! Yeah!”

Hopping up to the steps to the Clydesler Building Plaza, Spike looked at the pink earth pony jumping her way to the top of the stairs, happily humming her 15th song so far since they arrived at the city. Apparently, the newness and bigness of the city had overloaded the party pony with all of the party possibilities possible for a party pony. “Pinkie Pie!” he yelled, trying to catch her attention.

“Hm hm hmm hmmm hm hm hmmm- what?” she turned to face him mid-jump, slowly descending back to the pavement after a few seconds.

“Pinkie, we're here.” the dragon pointed at the imposing building, majestically lit up from top to bottom now that it was nighttime. “Now c'mon, we gotta get in there and help the girls get back our Twilight!” he called, running ahead of the two mares, who followed him close behind.

Upon entering the lobby, the trio from Ponyville were greeted with a curious sight: a crowd of onlookers and newsponies surrounded a small group of EMT ponies that seemed to be patching up a herd of security ponies. The injured guards had small bruises all over, some of them even had black eyes- but each and every one of them looked absolutely beautiful. It was as if a group of runway models had suddenly joined a moshpit. Mares and colts, they all had perfectly coiffed manes, shining, recently-brushed coats, and gleaming hooves, not to mention their guard uniforms looked impeccably hand-washed and pressed.

“Guys! It must be a Fashion Show After-Party!” exclaimed the earth pony, hopping with joy. Spike facepalmed.

A number of ponies from the crowd turned to look where the sudden outburst had come from, silence suddenly filling the lobby. Fluttershy blushed

and shrunk back behind Pinkie Pie, not particularly enjoying everypony's attention.

"Is that..." One newspony squinted. "Ms. Fluttershy!"

"Eep!"

The crowd suddenly erupted, quickly surrounding Fluttershy, Pinkie Pie and Spike. "It's Ms. Fluttershy!" "Ms. Fluttershy what are you doing in Manehattan?" Camera flashes firing from every direction. "When is your next fashion show?" "Can I get a moment of your time, Ms. Fluttershy?" "Ms. Fluttershy I want to have your foals!" "Please Ms. Fluttershy, are you coming out of retirement?"

Fluttershy tried backing away from the assault, but the crowd had already already encircled them. "Um... I... uh... eeeep!"

Spike loosed a fireball straight up, quickly making the crowd retreat a few feet away. "Everyone stop crowding her!"

"Yeah you big meanies! Can't you see you're being all scary?!" Pinkie Pie said, appearing behind the crowd.

"T-thanks, um, guys..." Fluttershy, her long mane covering half her face, walked back to Spike's side.

Stepping through the crowd, one of the totally gorgeous guards made his way to Fluttershy and her friends. "Ms. Fluttershy, what can I do for you tonight?" he asked, mane flitting softly in the wind, a sparkle accompanying his stare.

Fluttershy wondered how the colt's mane could be moving like that with no actual wind, but decided not to ask. "Um..." squinting, the yellow pegasus read the guard's nametag. "Mr. Daze, I... that is, we, my friends and I... came here to find um, Twilight Sparkle and uh..." she turned back to Spike in askance.

"Oh, uh, the Great and Powerful Trixie." added Spike, realizing that Fluttershy had not stayed for the entirety of Trixie's disastrous visit to Ponyville.

The crowd exploded once again at the mention of Trixie's name. "Ms. Fluttershy what is your relationship to The Great and Powerful Trixie?" "Ms.

Fluttershy what is your role in The Great and Powerful Trixie's upcoming movie?" "Ms. Fluttershy, are you the father of Twilight's Sparkle's foal?"

"Alright alright that's it, everypony out!" called one of the guards as she beautifully waved her baton, closely backed by the rest of the convalescing, attractive guards.

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"Alright, send them up." Miss Spelling let go of the intercom's button, facing Rainbow Dash. "Who are these ponies again?"

Rainbow Dash looked up from where she was using a red pen to make changes to Twilight's contract. "Oh, well, Fluttershy is Twi's Animal Handler, on account of her dragon pet thing. That's Spike, the dragon pet thing." The pegasus rolled her eyes, tapping the pen to her chin. "Pinkie Pie is Twilight's Event Coordinator." crossing her forelegs over her chest, Rainbow Dash tilted her head back, squinting her eyes. "There's also Rarity, her Stylist, and uh, Applejack is her Caterer." she finished, blushing lightly.

The Great and Powerful Trixie could only stare at the 'Lawyer' in disbelief. 'Are you for real?!'

Miss Spelling adjusted her glasses. "...I see. Ms. Sparkle has quite the entourage."

"T'chyeah! You know it, babe!" the pegasus exclaimed, flexing her foreleg.

The orange unicorn rolled her eyes, before turning to the dark pegasus that had recently joined them. "Now, how much longer will we have to wait for Ms. Mistral, Holly?"

Holly Diver had been keeping busy at the far end of the table, deleting photo after photo from the cameras she had recently acquired from the now reasonably wealthy newsponies. "Rafale? She's a good kid, I bet she's on her way here right now with Ms. Sparkle." smiled the pegasus, leaning back on her tilting chair, hind legs on the table. Every few minutes, she would let loose a barely-contained chuckle as she glossed over the pictures that had been taken that afternoon.

The Great and Powerful Trixie had been slowly trying to inch her way over to the gray pony, curiosity gnawing away at her, but much too proud to admit that she wanted to see the compromising pictures of the incident.

In the meantime, Rainbow Dash and Miss Spelling had been poring over Twilight's contract, the orange unicorn quickly noticing that the cyan pegasus seemed to be arbitrarily adding a 20% cut to every royalty clause, as well as scribbling small notes and drawings depicting her disagreement with the wording of certain parts of the contract. Miss Spelling had to admit that the Counselor was frighteningly astute at spotting purposely obtuse legalese- her unorthodox style belied a sharp, cunning mind that hungered for justice. Miss Spelling smiled a bit as she read the attorney's latest scribble, '← Totally not cool- FIX IT!', with the 'FIX IT!' circled over repeatedly, a grumpy pony face drawn next to it. 'She must be absolutely **dazzling** to watch in the court-room!'

Quickly running the numbers in her head, Miss Spelling realized that the final draft of this contract will probably leave Twilight Sparkle with enough bits to buy the entire town of Ponyville a few times over. 'Yup. So fired. Very fired.' her smile widened.

That was when the double doors of the meeting room exploded open, Pinkie Pie rolling into the room and striking a martial arts pose, closely followed by Fluttershy and Spike, who merely walked in. The secretary behind them had decided to ignore their intrusion. "There she is! Get her!" yelled Spike, pointing at Trixie.

"WHOO! Yeah! Get 'er!" Jokingly cheered Rainbow Dash, startling Miss Spelling. Holly Diver quickly picked up one of the cameras and held the shutter down, catching frame by frame as as one of the new ponies leaped from the meeting room's entrance and dove directly towards The Great and Powerful Trixie.

"YIIIAAAAAHH!" Squealed Trixie, getting mowed down by Fluttershy, both mares crashing to the floor and skidding for a few feet, with the pegasus ending up on top.

And then everyone in the office felt a cold chill deep within their hearts, their very souls, as the room's temperature dropped to single-digits; Fluttershy had used The Stare on The Great and Powerful Trixie. "Um, WHAT did you DO to our precious **Twilight**?!" she asked forcefully through clenched teeth.

The Great and Powerful Trixie's eyes widened as she tried to look away, her entire body growing cold and refusing to respond to even the smallest requests her brain was making. She felt trapped within herself, forced to look straight into a pair of eyes that seemed to be able to see anything and everything about the azure mare. She felt the summation of her whole life, the entirety of her feelings and innermost thoughts- all laid bare under Fluttershy's stare.

Everyone present had been frozen in place as well; Spike was at the entrance to the room, still with his arm outstretched and pointing in Trixie's direction, his mouth agape. Pinkie Pie had been frozen mid-jump, and was currently suspended in the air, eyes wide; Rainbow Dash had her own hoof outstretched skyward, having been caught mid-cheer, Miss Spelling next to her, glasses having flown off her face after the cyan mare's outburst. Holly Diver couldn't will her body to react- her chair had tilted past its balancing point during Fluttershy's leap, and now she could only brace mentally as her inner ear treated her to an eternity of falling sensations, even if it actually was more like a second and a half.

Fluttershy was startled out of The Stare when Holly hit the floor with a loud curse. Momentarily confused, she looked around the room, finding everyone staring at her. Blushing under the attention, the meek pegasus lowered her gaze, only to come face-to-face with an azure mare that she had never met before. "Oh! Um, excuse me!" Fluttershy realized that she had been pinning down the mare, and quickly started flapping her wings to move away.

Trixie quickly sat up, reached out and grabbed the pegasus, hugging her tight. "Trixie is...! I... I'm sorry, I'm sorry, **I'm sorry!**" she began, her tears falling freely. "Trixie didn't mean for it turn out this way, really!" Trixie started crying harder, her shuddering lamentation filling the room. "It all happened so fast! S-she was never supposed to know!"

Fluttershy flinched with every sob produced by the azure unicorn. She didn't understand the situation; she didn't even know this pony that well, but she could feel her sadness and regret. "It's ok, Ms. Trixie," began the pegasus, as she brought her hooves around the sorrowful pony, "you mustn't cry, please- just tell me what's wrong- I promise my friends and I will try our best to help you..."

Rainbow Dash blinked; she could feel Fluttershy's kindness resonating within herself as she got up from her sofa and made her way to where the two ponies were still embracing. "I uh... Y-yeah, c'mon dork, you're not that big of a screw-up!" she said, awkwardly putting her hoof on Trixie's shoulder. "I mean,

that script you wrote was, uh, kinda really cool,” Rainbow Dash blushed, “...ya know, if you're into that sappy stuff!”

Trixie blushed, chuckling despite herself. Rainbow Dash must have read the script at least three times, completely engrossed each time.

“Here ya go, you silly-filly!” Pinkie Pie was sitting next to Trixie, holding out a large, exquisitely-decorated cake, one slice already missing. On top, and written in cursive frosting, the cake read 'GET HAPPY SOON!'

Trixie blinked, wiping her tears. “Whuh... Where did you get that cake?”

“Well duh, I made it just for you!” Pinkie Pie replied, handing Trixie a big slice of the cake on a paper plate, along with a dixie cup full of fruit punch.

“But, but WHEN-” Trixie was interrupted by Rainbow Dash, who had nudged her shoulder to get her attention. The showmare turned to face the cyan pegasus, who just gave her a 'Don't ask.' look as she enjoyed a slice of the cake.

Miss Spelling looked at the group of ponies and one dragon surrounding The Great and Powerful Trixie, all of them sharing cake as if they had always been the best of friends. Bringing a piece of her own slice to her mouth, the orange unicorn flinched. This cake was good, really good, but sweeter than anything she had ever tasted since at least elementary school.

“Quite the entourage you have, Ms. Sparkle.”

Chapter 8

Missy and Holly

Detective Gummie Horseshoe stood near the wall of the spartan room, glaring at the dangerous and hurtfully judgmental criminal that sat opposite to Officer Flat-Hoof; a small table separated them. Thanks to the mysterious traffic jam, it had taken the police carriage two hours to get back to the station- two very long hours of vehement criticism and slander levied against Manehattan's finest, and *specifically* against her, had made the Detective pony quite *surly*.

Processing the perp had been another eternal nightmare- the criminal's litany of complaints reached a new crescendo when Flat-Hoof presented the ink in which the pony had to dip her hooves to record her hoofprints. The criminal demanded her hooves be washed in purified water from Lake Minnetrotka after she was offered rubbing alcohol for cleaning them. The grievances only escalated after she was denied her fancy water, though she seemed momentarily elated at having her mug shots taken; she *insisted* she be given her own set of photographs for her portfolio.

Making their way to the sparsely decorated questioning room, Rarity was seated at a small square table in the middle of the space, with Officer Flat-Hoof sitting across from her. Rarity at least found this colt halfway tolerable, unlike the brutish, unladylike filly that wore aviator shades at night and indoors. '*So terribly uncouth! Such appalling behavior! Such obnoxious, unruly hair!*' The room was dreary, to say the least. Four walls, painted gray and slightly-grayer-gray, an even grayer door, and a white fluorescent lamp on the ceiling that emitted an annoying, low buzz; the lamp was flickering at the same high frequency as its buzz, bathing the room in a grayish, depressing light.

"Miss Rarity, I'd like to get your own account of this afternoon's events, if it's not too much trouble." Flat-Hoof produced a small notepad and a pencil from one of his pockets.

Rarity could not stop looking at the policemare. '*Does she not **own** a mirror?*' The unicorn took a second to scowl at the offensive-looking, wild-maned light-gray filly, who had been glaring at her the moment they had entered the room. Turning back her attention to the dark blue colt, the seamstress sighed. "I would like to have my attorney present for this, Officer." Of course,

Rarity didn't actually *have* an attorney, but the longer she could stall being sent off to jail, the better.

Flat-Hoof sighed, wondering how much overtime he was going to work this night. "Alright, Miss Rarity, we'll see to it that you do. May I have the name and address of your attorney?"

"Yes, right... name..." Rarity's mind raced- the unicorn didn't know any law ponies, but perhaps one of her friends could help her out; Twilight *would* know what to do... *'But she's off gallivanting Celestia-knows-where with that little blue temptress!'* Fluttershy and Pinkie Pie were automatically disqualified- too Fluttershy and too... Pinkie. *'Applejack... That pony is a **terrible** liar!'* Rarity winced; that only left one pony she could call upon...

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Miss Spelling placed the contract in a blue binder that had her cutie mark printed on its cover. "It's been a long day, everyone, and I would like to be well rested for tomorrow's discussions." glancing at Holly Diver, she continued. "Though I do not doubt that Ms. Mistral will bring back Ms. Sparkle tonight, I do not believe any of us are in the mood for negotiations at this hour." she glanced at the ponies stuffed full of cake, still lazing on the floor around The Great and Powerful Trixie; the dragon among them had been stifling yawns for a while now. "Counselor Dash, I will make lodging arrangements for you and the rest of Ms. Twilight's assistants at the Reinz-Carlton; I know you all came here on very short notice." Miss Spelling noticed the raised eyebrow the smirking Holly Diver was giving her, to which the orange unicorn responded with an even look. "I will leave a message at the lobby so that Ms. Sparkle and the rest of her Assistants know where to find you once they arrive."

"Hey yeah... Where IS Rarity?" Asked Spike as he stood up from the floor, suddenly realizing that the most beautiful of ponies was not bestowing her holy radiance upon the unworthy souls gathered there in the room. "We dropped her off a *while* ago!"

Pinkie Pie hopped to her hooves. "Ohmygosh Spike, you're right!"

Rainbow Dash got up from the floor and looked at Miss Spelling questioningly. "That's weird, they never called us to tell us Rarity was lookin' for us..."

“Oh, I hope nothing's happened to her... There was such a frightful crowd in the lobby when we arrived...” Fluttershy trotted up to the cyan pegasus's side.

Miss Spelling adjusted her glasses. “Then it would seem she was turned away by security for some reason. I've got to talk to the ponies down at the lobby anyways, I will ask about her. For now, if it's not too much trouble for Ms. Trixie, perhaps you could all wait in the Executive Penthouse while I make the arrangements with the hotel?”

The Great and Powerful Trixie blushed as the Ponyville denizens looked at her expectantly. It would be no trouble at all, the azure mare realized- she *wanted* to spend more time with these ponies. “That will be more than fine- Trixie is as philanthropic as she is talented!” Trixie could hardly contain her smile- these ponies had seen the most magnificent pony in all of Equestria for who she really was: an immature, scared little filly- and they *still* treated her as an equal! They wanted to *help* her! “In fact, Miss Spelling should forget her silly little hotels,” Trixie waved a dismissive hoof at the orange unicorn, “...there is *more* than enough room in Trixie's penthouse for everypony.” The prospect of a sleepover made the showmare quite giddy.

Miss Spelling used her magic to remove her glasses, floating a napkin to clean them. She was surprised, to say the least, at The Great and Powerful Trixie's offer: it was probably the first time Trixie had actively sought a *cheaper* solution to *anything*. “Is that alright with you ladies, Mr. Spike?”

Rainbow Dash shrugged and gave a lazy smile. “Cool with me.” Besides her, Spike yawned/nodded, joining the ponies as they started gathering near the door.

“And if Dashie's cool with it, then so am I, cause Dashie *totally* knows her Cool!” the pink earth pony hopped over to the cyan pegasus and ruffled her mane under her hat.

Fluttershy watched as Rainbow Dash tried to bite Pinkie Pie's hoof, before proceeding to chase her around the room. “If... if we're not imposing...”

Putting her glasses back on, Miss Spelling nodded. “Well, if that's the case, then that's quite alright.” Spelling's horn glowed as she floated her binder into a saddlebag that was under the large table. Placing the bag around her back, she turned to Holly Diver, who nodded silently at her. “I will draft the revised contract tonight and present it to the shareholders in the morning. If all

goes as planned, I'd like to meet back here after lunch, say, at around three in the afternoon?"

With everyone in agreement, Miss Spelling and Holly Diver stayed behind as the rest of the ponies and one dragon made their way to the elevator. "I've got the key to the office, you can leave the cameras here and finish up tomorrow."

Holly smiled at the unicorn as she slung one of the cameras around her neck with a camera brace. "You're just saying that cause you've had me and Rafale on overtime since three in the afternoon."

Stepping out to the hallway, both ponies bid goodbye to the secretary, who was also packing up to leave. The unicorn and the pegasus made their way to the elevators in comfortable silence. It didn't take long for one of the elevators to reach their floor, it was probably the returning one Trixie and her new friends had used.

Once inside, Miss Spelling used her magic to press the button for the main lobby's floor; watching the elevator doors close, she addressed the pegasus besides her. "You didn't delete all the pictures, did you?"

Holly Diver, who had been eying the camera's display, looked up at the unicorn. "Well, I deleted all the pictures, you know, all the blurry ones. And the ones with bad lighting. And with bad composition."

"Hm."

The dark pegasus smiled broadly as she stepped closer to the unicorn. "Look." Holly Diver tilted the camera to the side, presenting its back to the orange mare.

Miss Spelling examined the picture on display. "You've got a good eye, Holly. I'd like to have a copy of that one, it could be useful."

"No problem." Holly Diver said, smirking.

The silence that followed was punctuated only by the muted chimes indicating each floor that passed by. The whole time, Holly Diver was smirking at the unicorn in front of her. "Is there anything else, Holly?" asked Miss Spelling, slightly unnerved by the simpering pegasus.

“Oh, well I don't know, maybe you can tell me.” Holly Diver turned off the camera. “You're making a new contract for Ms. Sparkle, you were gonna put them up in an expensive-as-Luna hotel, and you've had that goofy smile plastered on your face for at least a couple of hours now.” The pegasus's own smile was nearly insufferable. “You're up to something.”

Miss Spelling quickly trained her smile into an even line; the unicorn really thought she had put that thing away as soon as it had edged across her muzzle. “...I *am* allowed to smile, Holly.”

Holly Diver nonchalantly supported her weight on her two right legs as she crossed her left legs over. “I never said you weren't.”

“Good, then.”

“Good.”

Silence befell them once more, Miss Spelling still staring straight ahead. The chimes continued. A few seconds passed. “Is there *anything else*, Diver?” asked the unicorn tersely, feeling the pegasus's grin boring into the back of her skull.

“What?” Even her words were smiling, “Am I not allowed to smile too?”

A beat. “I suppose you are.” The unicorn closed her eyes and breathed deeply.

“I suppose so too.” They were nearing the ground floor now. “Hey Missy.”

Miss Spelling opened her eyes but still maintained her gaze forward. “...Yes?”

The elevator dinged one last time as it finally reached the lobby. “You should smile more often.”

With a scowling blush Miss Spelling finally turned her head to face the pegasus, but Holly Diver was already trotting past her and out the elevator door. Regaining her composure after a few seconds, the orange mare caught up to the gray pegasus, who was already waiting for her at the main lobby.

Apple-eating grin in place, Holly Diver had been watching her long-time employer walk over from the elevator when something caught her peripheral

vision. "Whoa Daze, what happened, colt? Do you transform into a Stud at night or something?"

The lazy security guard placed an elbow on the desk, giving the pegasus his profile, wind caressing his mane. "Like what you see, Diver?"

"Eh, I could get used to it." she smiled and shrugged, not noticing the odd look that passed by Miss Spelling's face for a brief moment.

The colt raised his eyebrow. "Really now? My shift's over in a couple of hours, maybe you and I could-"

"Pfffft!" Holly quickly brought a hoof to her mouth so as not to spray the colt. "I'd rather spend a thousand years banished to the moon." she smiled brightly.

The security pony cringed. At least he was alone at the desk; he didn't really need the day-shift guards to see him get shot down for the umpteenth time. "*Ouch!* That's cold, Diver. Dark-side-of-the-Moon cold!"

"What can I say," she began, quickly glancing at Miss Spelling and giving her a wink, "...I'm married to my job."

With a slight reddening of her cheeks, and wishing she had a napkin to clean her glasses, the unicorn turned to the security guard. "Mr. D-daze." She blushed a little as her voice faltered. Clearing her throat, she continued, "Mr. Daze, I'm expecting some acquaintances of Ms. Trixie to come in tonight. Ms. Mistral will be escorting Ms. Twilight Sparkle, and you will also meet Ms. Applejack." Miss Spelling stopped for a second to wonder why the colt's mane was swaying in the wind. "Please direct them to the Executive Penthouse when they come in, and tell them that negotiations will resume tomorrow at 3:00pm."

The colt wrote down the instructions in an oddly alluring manner, finishing by gently biting the end of the pen as he winked at the mares. "Anything else?"

Holly Diver stepped back involuntarily, her body reacting negatively to the colt's mannerisms. Miss Spelling simply adjusted her glasses. "Yes, we were expecting another filly during the afternoon, according to Ms. Twilight's associates. We did not receive any calls from the front desk; did anypony by the name of Ms. Rarity drop in?"

The pen dropped from the colt's mouth with a loud clatter as his eyes glazed over for a second. Slowly, he turned to face the unicorn mare. "U-uh, yeah, but we uh, took care of her."

"Took... care of her...?" Miss Spelling used her magic to remove her glasses.

Daze slammed his hoof on the desk, his eyes suddenly wide. "The filly was *crazy*! She barged in here armed to the teeth! I swear she looked like one of those legendary desert warmares!" The lazy colt's eyes flicked between the two mares in front of him. "It took like twenty of us to take her out!"

"Wicked!" Holly Diver was quite impressed, and at the same time disappointed she had missed the battle. "What was she armed with?"

The security pony locked eyes with the pegasus. "Swords, spears, shields, this weird ax thing on her horn... She was a trotting armory!" He excitedly flailed his front hooves, almost reliving the moment.

Miss Spelling felt faint for a moment. She did not *need* any more controversy around this movie, and now an assistant of Twilight Sparkle's had apparently tried to rush the building, swords a-blazing? "So, she came in, swords swinging... Why?"

Daze went silent for a moment, before turning away from the mares. "Well ok, I guess it was *one* sword, and she never did... *swing* it."

Holly Diver rolled her eyes. "Pfft, knew it sounded too awesome to be true."

The unicorn glowered at the security colt. "So she came in and threatened to strike you with her sword."

"Uh..." Daze scratched his lustrous black mane. "She uh, she asked if we would be kind enough to show her to her friend's meeting." the colt was suddenly finding it hard to meet the unicorn's eyes.

Miss Spelling felt a headache coming on. "So you detained her and explained that her carrying weapons could be misconstrued as intent to assault."

Daze winced. Holly Diver winced as well; hers was a pity wince towards the poor security guard. The colt coughed. "A few of the guys tackled her to the

ground when she was signing her name- *you know*, when you break it down like *that*, of **course** it's gonna **sound** bad!" the colt did *not* like where this line of questioning was going. "She started bucking and kicking us really, really hard!"

Having no napkins nearby, Miss Spelling shakily put her glasses back on. Counting to ten, she breathed in and out a few times. "Self-defense." she muttered, before using her magic to drag the colt over the desk and to the floor in front of her. "You're going to *personally* call your superiors, and you will *tell* them that the security firm is *not* going press charges against Miss Rarity."

"But-" he yipped as Miss Spelling pulled on his ear with her telekinetic magic. '*What are you, my mom?!*' Worst of all, he was being admonished in front of Holly Diver!

"It's either that or a long, expensive, and *very* public trial that the firm will definitely lose. I know for a fact that you will lose because Miss Rarity's attorney will most likely be Counselor Dash, who is as *brilliant* as you and your ponies are *unprofessional*." Miss Spelling's horn flickered off, releasing the guard's ear.

Daze had never actually *seen* the orange unicorn in anything other than a neutral mood; it was rather unnerving. "But I can't just-"

Miss Spelling stamped her hoof loudly. "Did your ponies identify themselves as security ponies, and clarify their intent and reasons before engaging Miss Rarity?"

Holly Diver could only shake her head in disappointment at the poor colt's drawn-out silence; that kind of rookie mistake could cost quite a few ponies their job. Giving an apologetic look at the crest-fallen guard, the pegasus hurried to the building's main entrance, stepping out to the plaza where Miss Spelling was walking away without another word.

"A little harsh on the guy, don'tcha think?" Holly Diver caught up with the unicorn, slowing her trot to match her employer's gait.

"Perhaps." Both ponies stepped down the stairs of the plaza, before continuing down on the sidewalk. "But this movie's got enough forces trying to work against it... I will apologize to your friend once I know for sure that Miss Rarity is in the clear."

Holly Diver snickered. "You're such a softie, Missy."

“Also, I am docking your overtime pay for unprofessional conduct and suggestive comments made to your employer.”

“ . . . ”

“ . . . ”

“...Worth it.”

- - -

The Great and Powerful Trixie could not remember the last time she felt this kind of pleasant contentment. She had spent the better part of an hour just talking and drinking with the three ponies from Ponyville, shooting the breeze and trading tales of adventure with them over the generous amounts of liquor that Metro Goldmane Brayer had stocked the apartment with. They were all gathered at the kitchen table, the pink earth pony doing an admirable job as bartender, seeming to know just the right amount of alcohol needed to keep the group in a relaxed buzz, the conversation flowing carelessly. Where Pinkie Pie had gotten the bartender *outfit* she was wearing, Trixie chose not to ask.

“And it was the most infuriating *thing!*” Trixie pointed her swaying hoof at Fluttershy, or at least towards the light-yellow pegasus's general direction across the table. “Those first couple of weeks, the only thing Trixie could cast were images of that, that...!” Raising her shot glass with magic, Trixie quickly downed the pink concoction the bartender had provided. “...That, that...”

“Omega Nerd?” Offered Rainbow Dash, nursing a warm beer and sitting to Trixie's left.

Fluttershy downed her 15th shot of Friendship Lubricant. “Um, nice, kind pony?”

“Super-duper, pretty smart smarty-pants?” Pinkie very quickly placed another shot in front of Fluttershy, this one seemed to be on fire. *Pink fire.*

“Yeah! That!” Trixie pointed at no one in particular, “The pretty pony one, who said that one?”

Pinkie Pie placed a very colorful drink in front of Trixie. "I think Rainbow Dash did! What does she win?"

"What'd I do now what?" Rainbow Dash hadn't been paying that much attention- now that the excitement of the day's events had passed, her mind had been allowed to mull over certain other things, and a certain other pony. She was quickly brought out of her thoughts, however, by a forceful knock at the door; raising her head and looking around the gathered ponies, she smiled a bit, "That's gotta be Twilight!"

The Great and Powerful Trixie was stock-still for a moment as Pinkie Pie took hold of her hooves and started swinging them happily. "She's here she's here she's here! Aren't you like, so mega-ultra-happy that you could explode thrice?!"

Fluttershy gave the showmare a bright smile. "I bet she'll be just as happy to see you, Trixie." the yellow pegasus blew out her drink before quickly downing it.

Rainbow Dash grinned at The Great and Powerful Trixie's luminescent blush, the filly couldn't even form any words. "Such a dork!" she said, flapping her way to the door. Adjusting her hat, she put on her best smirk as she opened the door. "Bout time you got here babe, a certain *somepony* was starting to miss ya-" Rainbow Dash lost the ability to form words as a luminescent blush covered her face, her wings quickly springing to attention.

Applejack's confident, half-lidded eyes stared back at the cyan pegasus with a raised eyebrow. "Is that right?" a half-smile, "Well, you tell that certin' *somepony* that this here filly's been missin' her an awful lot too, Sugarcube." the farmer winked at the weather pony.

Rainbow Dash's eyes widened in surprise as she suddenly skidded backwards a few feet by way of telekinesis, before the now-sober Trixie quickly took her place at the apartment entrance. The showmare's horn was still pulsating with purple magic as she pointed it at Applejack. "What happened to her? What'd you **DO** to her?!"

It was at that moment that Rainbow Dash noticed for the first time that the Omega Nerd was slumped over Applejack's back.

"Will ya quit yer yellin', ya bronc!" Applejack hissed at The Great and Powerful Trixie, "Twilight's just sleepin'!" Stepping forward to enter the

apartment, the farmer eyed the azure pony. "Don't ever let me catch you implyin' I'd hurt *any* of my friends ever again, unless ya'll wanna lose that fancy horn o' yours."

Fluttershy approached the showmare and put a comforting hoof on her withers, as she turned to address the farmer. "Um, please don't be mad at her Applejack, Trixie has been feeling just *awful* about everything that's happened."

The Great and Powerful Trixie lowered her head in shame, softly scratching the floor with her hoof. "Trixie is sorry, A-Applejack. Trixie was... worried."

For a second, Applejack wondered if she may have had too much to drink at the pub. *'Did The Great and Powerful Trixie just... apologize?!'* Then, she noticed it. Fluttershy, that sweet, gentle pony, had her sweet, gentle hoof on a crest-fallen, almost-teary Trixie. *'Poor foal must've gotten Stared something fierce!'* Applejack couldn't help but chuckle. "Ah s'pose Ah would'of had a similar reaction if Ah saw one of my friends all unconscious-like." Trotting further into the apartment, she whistled softly. "Fancier than a apple tree in full bloom! Now, we should put this filly to bed, she's plum tucker'd out on account-a yesterday's drinkin' and today's... *whatever* happened to her today."

The Great and Powerful Trixie trotted to Applejack's side. "Come, let's put her in Trixie's bed."

Rainbow Dash cheered. "**Yeah** baby!"

"Ooh! Ooh!" Pinkie Pie quickly undid the bow tie from her bartender outfit, "Remember to hang this around the doorknob!" she exclaimed, galloping towards Trixie and tying it around her horn.

Fluttershy softly padded to Trixie's side. "Please be gentle, Twilight is *such* a tender soul."

The room was silent for a full minute as Trixie, enveloped in a full-body blush, tried in vain to pick her jaw up from the floor. "Wh-... whuh.. THAT IS NOT WHAT TRIXIE MEANT." her voice squeaked nervously. Her head flicked anxiously from side to side as she looked at each of the ponies gathered.

Fluttershy was the first to break. "Pfft..."

Trixie twitched.

Rainbow Dash, Pinkie Pie and Fluttershy all started rolling on the floor, laughing themselves to tears. Trixie blushed further, trying to find somewhere to hide her embarrassment. Applejack just looked on, mightily confused.

Chapter 9

Corrallin' a Rainbow

“...So after that, they handed over Twilight, an' told me not to worry none 'bout Rarity, 'cause they knew where she was stayin' at.” Applejack explained as she finished her 'drink'; Pinkie Pie knew of the farmer's elevated tolerance for alcohol and had taken to making sure that the orange pony's drinks always contained equal parts thunder and lightning, as well as a heaping amount of shock and awe. 'Might as well be drinking a ball of fire.' she mused, appreciating the party pony's thoughtful gesture as she felt the drink almost dissolve her internal organs.

“Well, Ah don't know 'bout you ladies,” Applejack smiled at the group, giving Rainbow Dash a very quick glance, “But this here filly's gonna need to walk off all these drinks before she passes out from the fumes!” Pushing her chair back, the draft pony gave another quick glance to the cyan pegasus, “Ya'll just keep on havin' fun, Ah'll be back lickety-split!”

“Um, be safe, Applejack.” Fluttershy watched as her farmer friend trotted over to the door and left the apartment.

“YAAWWN.” Rainbow Dash called attention to herself. “Man, I am beat! I think I'mma head outside and find a nice cloud to sleep on!” she said, theatrically stretching her hooves and wings. “Smell ya later, guys!”

“Have a good one, Dashie! Don't forget to write!” Pinkie Pie waved excitedly as she watched the pegasus walk out the door. As soon as the door was shut, she quickly turned to Fluttershy with a devious smile.

The Great and Powerful Trixie was suddenly very confused as Fluttershy not only returned the devious smile, but then directed one at the showmare as well! “What is... going on?”

“Duh! We're gonna follow them!” Pinkie explained as she and Fluttershy got up from the table.

Hesitantly getting up, Trixie still didn't understand. “For what? Applejack said that she would return soon, and the pegasus is merely going to sleep!”

Fluttershy softly nudged Trixie's side, trying to get her to move. "Um, I don't think Rainbow Dash was entirely truthful..." she said with a gentle smile.

Trixie started walking along at the yellow pegasus's insistence. "She wasn't?"

Pinkie Pie rolled her eyes as she walked towards the door. "Double-duh! They're a pair of fibby McLiar-liar-docks-on-fire super-bluffy spurious sponies!"

Trixie stopped, raising an eyebrow. "Sponies?"

Pinkie turned back to face the showmare. "What?"

"You... You said 'Sponies'." Trixie stated evenly.

Hitching an eyebrow herself, Pinkie Pie tilted her head in abject curiosity until it was completely upside-down. "Silly filly, that's not even a word!" giggled the pony, the rest of her body rotating to match her upside-down head. "Sponies, hah!" the pony rotated along her lateral axis, righting herself and facing door.

The Great and Powerful Trixie had to swallow her complaint as Fluttershy gently shushed the showmare, pointing at Pinkie Pie who proceeded to turn off the light and then started to carefully open the penthouse door, peering outside as she did so. Nodding to herself, the party pony opened the door just enough to squeeze out. Holding out her left hoof back towards the pegasus and the unicorn, [Hold position], the earth pony furtively pressed her back against the hallway wall, sidling alongside it for a few steps.

Still facing down the hallway, Pinkie Pie pointed her hoof twice at the door, before pointing the same hoof downwards to the space behind herself, and finally making a small sweeping motion close to the floor. [Two, to me- stay low]

Trixie rolled her eyes. 'You have **got** to be kidding.' The showmare resigned herself to follow along, closing the apartment door and walking slowly behind Fluttershy, who softly ambled to the pink pony's side. Near the far end of the hallway, Trixie spotted Rainbow Dash trotting up to the elevators; she briefly wondered what was the point of turning off the light in the apartment if the rest of the hallway was lit. Pinkie Pie's motioning caught Trixie's attention- the earth pony pointed twice towards a door a short distance ahead before bringing her hoof over her head in a sweeping motion. [Two, go forward, I'll cover]

Trixie walked behind Fluttershy, who swiftly and silently trotted over to the unlocked metal door and nudged it open with her head; the space behind it seemed to be a small break room with a table and a few vending machines. Trixie winced when the door creaked as it returned to its closed position; the showmare peered out the small, rectangular window on it, but couldn't see the earth pony. 'Did she run back into the apartment?'

Rainbow Dash turned her head and looked back down the hallway towards the penthouse door. 'Great, now I'm hearing things too! Gotta calm down, it's just Applejack! Just Applejack!' The pegasus gulped as she turned her attention back to the digital display above one of the elevators. It seems this particular elevator had gone up and stopped at the 86th floor. 'Alright, here goes nothing!' Rainbow Dash pressed the metallic button on the wall between the two elevators, calling the closest one back down. The acrobatic pony didn't need to wait long, hesitating for only a moment as the elevator returned and opened its door for her.

Trixie's eyes became small black dots as she witnessed Pinkie Pie's head peek out from under the hallway's long, luxurious carpet. The carpet itself was completely flat, no indication whatsoever that the earth pony's entire body was still underneath. The azure mare watched as Pinkie rolled out from under the carpet and sidled against the metal door, her unruly mane covering the small window. Trixie stepped away from the door when she heard Pinkie give two swift knocks. "Uh... Yes?"

"The password is 'Extrapolate!'" hissed the party pony urgently.

Fluttershy walked past The Great and Powerful Trixie and pulled the door open. "Hello, Pinkie Pie." she greeted pleasantly.

"Hiya Fluttershy!" Pinkie Pie waved before turning to Trixie and nodding once. "Ma'am." she said respectfully.

The showmare's mane became slightly frazzled as her left eye twitched. "Ma'am?!"

"Shh! C'mon, we gotta hurry before we lose 'em!" Pinkie Pie darted down the hallways towards the elevators, Fluttershy gamely flying behind her. Trixie heaved a sigh as she galloped towards the pair, stopping next to them and turning her attention towards the elevators. "It stopped!" Pinkie Pie exclaimed, pointing at the floor display.

“Well then, shall we get this over with?” The Great and Powerful Trixie stepped up to the call button, but the party pony pulled her back by her tail. “What is it now?” asked the showmare, turning back to face the pink pony with her tail in her mouth.

“We can't use the elevator! It'll give our position away! C'mon-” Pinkie Pie trotted towards a door next to the farthest elevator. “-we gotta take the stairs!” explained the earth pony, holding the door open for her squad.

The stairwell was decidedly utilitarian and undecorated, providing a deep contrast to the magnificent hallway the ponies had just come from. The Great and Powerful Trixie was thankful that elevator had stopped only five stories above theirs- there was entirely too much alcohol in her system right now to handle any kind of strenuous exercise. “What is it that the two ponies are hiding?” asked the showmare, wondering what the point of all this was.

Fluttershy and Pinkie Pie exchanged a look, the pink earth pony grinning mirthfully and the yellow pegasus smiling shyly. Both turned to face the showmare. “Um, Classified Information.” answered Fluttershy, winking sweetly at Trixie. The azure mare was slightly taken aback at the sight, finding the cuteness disarming.

Reaching the 86th floor, handily marked by the number painted on the wall in large red letters, Pinkie Pie handed the pegasus a tactical mirror. “Alright, we're here! Sergeant Fluttershy, security sweep!”

The kind pegasus nodded, taking the mirror's handle in her mouth and sneaking it under the door, which was promptly opened from the other side by a security mare. Fluttershy let out a goat-like bleat as her body went completely rigid, tipping over with a loud clatter. The Great and Powerful Trixie looked between the yellow pegasus on the floor and the uniformed pony in front of her. “Uh...”

The earth pony security guard arched an eyebrow. “The Observation Deck is closed after 9pm, ladies.”

The showmare fidgeted. “R-right... Trixie must have lost track of time...” Poking and nudging the downed pegasus, Trixie laughed nervously. “Such a kidder, this pony is... Apparently...” The unicorn's eyes suddenly went wide. Behind the security mare, a very familiar silhouette materialized from the shadows- the messy mane was unmistakable, though the goggles with glowing green lenses were new. Trixie's blood chilled as she watched Pinkie Pie's

forelegs stealthily encircle the security mare's neck. 'Oh Celestia is she going to-

"What the-!!"

"PLEEEEEEEASE~?" Pinkie Pie enveloped the security guard in a hug. "We just GOTTA see what our friends are up to!"

"L-let go of me!" The security guard slipped out of the party pony's embrace; dusting herself off, the pony looked back at the trio of trespassers. "Look, none of you are supposed to be up here, I could lose my job if anyone notices." The guard glanced around the spacious, darkened room, illuminated only by the moonlight filtering through the expansive windows and her own flashlight. "I'm already pushing my luck letting those two outside, there's no way I'm gonna keep letting more ponies wander around like that."

Pinkie Pie grinned. "But, don'tcha wanna know why those two wanted to be all alone out there?"

- - -

On the outdoor deck of the 86th floor, two figures stood in the darkness, softly outlined in blue moonlight. "...So."

"...So...?"

Applejack shuddered a bit. It had taken quite a bit of convincing to make the security guard open the door to the Observation Deck's outdoor section. The height was considerable, the night view was spectacular, and the strong breeze was as cold as the moon. None of that mattered right now. "Listen here, Rainbow Dash, Ah know how you must be feelin', but you had drank so much last night, Ah really thought-"

Rainbow Dash, who had been sitting on the ledge of the deck on top of the handrail, turned and hopped to the floor. "I was not drunk, AJ! I just needed something to loosen up, ya know, a little liquid courage to pour my stupid heart out like an idiot!"

Applejack winced. "Yer not an idiot, Ra-"

“Man, it's like I don't learn! Great burn there Applejack, you really had me going there last night- must have laughed all the way to the farm!”

The farmer quickly headbutted the pegasus, sending her skidding a few feet back. “Ok, Ah take that back, yer some kinda idjit alright!” Internally, Applejack was in a world of pain- Rainbow Dash's head was harder than any tree the orange pony had ever bucked. 'I guess that was to be expected.'

Rainbow Dash gritted her teeth, a tear welling in her eye. “What was that for?!”

The draft pony trotted over the pegasus, gently placing her forehead against Rainbow Dash's own. “Dash, ya'll wern't the only pony doin' some heart-pouring down by that meadow last night, now was you?”

The acrobat pressed back against Applejack's forehead with some force. Rainbow Dash had been replaying Applejack's words from the previous night in her mind every chance she got; the pegasus had to admit that the smooth-talking farmer could probably talk her way into anypony's barn. “Yeah well, I'm not the one that just up and ran away first chance she got!”

Applejack matched the pegasus's push; they were both straining to budge the other. “Dangit Rainbow Dash, if Ah didn't love ya so much I would pummel some sense into that bird-brain 'o yours! Ah already TOLD you, Ah **ain't** that kind of mare!” The farmer felt herself losing ground as Rainbow Dash began flapping her wings to push back harder. “Mah Granny always done told me to treat a Lady right!”

Rainbow Dash's effort quickly petered out as she stepped back from Applejack. The cyan pegasus looked decidedly nonplussed. “Wh... she did?”

Applejack blinked, then blushed. “Uh, ok, she told Big Macintosh to always treat a Lady right, but s'all the same thing!” The orange pony stamped her hoof. “Point is, Ah ain't the kinda mare to just love 'em and leave 'em, Rainbow Dash.”

Rainbow Dash blinked, her eyes widening at the intensity of Applejack's gaze. The constant breeze blowing across the outdoor deck picked up speed, whipping the farmer's long mane. The pegasus blushed a bit at the sight. “But, when I woke up you-”

“It was getting' to be mornin' and Ah had first shift at the farm- wern't gonna do me any good for Granny to wake up an' find that Ah hadn't returned

home all night!" The earth pony smiled, still looking straight into Rainbow Dash's eyes. "No offense Sugarcube, but you must be the downright laziest filly in Ponyville- Ah really thought you would still be sleepin' by the time my shift was done with, Rainbow Dash." Applejack's eyes shone mirthfully. "B'sides, Ah couldn't bring mahself to wake ya; ain't nothin' in Ponyville quite as adorable as yer sleepin' face."

Seeing the honesty in the farmer's eyes, the pegasus lowered her gaze, blushing brightly. "...So when you were chasing me 'round town..."

"Ah wanted to apologize, explain..." the farmer turned her head as she blushed, but still met the pegasus's gaze. "An' maybe pick up where we left off?" Applejack raised her eyebrow suggestively.

Rainbow Dash's wings popped to full span. "Uh."

Applejack chuckled. "Twice in one night? Yer gonna hafta get that looked at, Hun."

After picking her jaw up from the floor, the pegasus's face grew defiant. "G-good luck getting your hat back, tree-hugger!"

The farmer stepped closer to the acrobat. "Oh-ho-ho-ho, is that a challenge? Ah already ran all the way here from Ponyville for that thing, **and** the hat! It'll be easy as apple pie!"

Rainbow Dash blinked. "Wait a sec... Did you just call me..."

Applejack smirked. "Ah might've..."

"...A 'Lady'?! Who you callin' a 'Lady', chump?" the pegasus accused, pointing a hoof at the farmer.

Applejack face-hoofed, and she actually felt as if at least four more faces had hoofed at the same time. "You shore are slow fer a pony so quick, Rainbow Dash."

The pegasus's eye twitched. "Who you callin' slow-" Rainbow Dash barely avoided the orange hoof that almost decapitated her. "HA! Not even close, Appletini!" joked the acrobat, holding on to the cowpony hat and taking flight.

"Git back here ya mangy mustang!" the draft pony chased after the low-flying pegasus, who remained just out of reach for her. Applejack's hooves flailed ineffectively as Rainbow Dash easily dodged all of the farmer's attempts at taking back her hat.

"Come at me, Sap-sucker!" challenged the cyan mare, flying away from the Observation Deck and hovering a distance away from the building. Illuminated from below by the building's ground-level floodlights, Rainbow Dash grinned triumphantly at the earth pony- a grin that quickly faded as she witnessed the orange pony step away from the handrail, only to blast into a sprint before leaping over the ledge, and using the safety fence around the Deck as a stepping stone.

"HORSEAPPLES!" cursed the winged pony as she hurriedly propelled herself towards the airborne, not-winged pony. Awkwardly catching the farmer, Rainbow Dash held her close to her own body. "AJ what in Equestria do you think you're doing?!" Staring into shining, green eyes, Rainbow Dash only then realized how close Applejack's face was to her own; she almost forgot to keep beating her wings, and she most certainly forgot how to breathe.

"Well," began the farmer, deftly pulling at the drawstring around Rainbow Dash's neck and taking back her hat, "Ah reckon Ah got my hat back- that there means Ah won- where's my prize?"

The now completely red Rainbow Dash found her voice and intelligence lacking. "I... Uh, I..."

"You? Ah won me a Rainbow Dash? I s'ppose that ain't a half-bad consolation prize." Applejack brought her hooves around Rainbow Dash's neck and hugged her gently as they touched ground back on the Observation Deck.

Rainbow Dash didn't trust her brain or mouth anymore, so she just opted to return the embrace, hugging Applejack tightly, and nuzzling the side of her face. Each mare whispering confessions made the night before, they held each other like that for a few minutes, until a small voice, "Yay." startled them into separating.

The couple looked at each other, and then towards the darkness of the indoor section of the Deck, where a sudden shuffling erupted, hushed voices urgently whispering calls for silence. The bright moonlight shone upon the 4-pony lump trying to look inconspicuous at the edge of the shadows inside of the

building. Applejack and Rainbow Dash trotted over to the lump, standing right next to it and looking down upon it.

“Don't worry guys, their visual acuity's based on movement- they'll lose you if you don't move!” whispered a familiar, jovial voice.

Applejack stomped her hoof, startling the pony mass. “Ya'll oughta be ashamed of yerselves, spyin' on yer friends like that!”

“Y-yeah!” exclaimed the security pony, quickly rolling away from the rest of the group and training her flashlight on them. “We've caught you red-hoofed, uh, friend-spies!”

“Super lame, guys!” Rainbow Dash hoped they couldn't see her tremendous blush in the dark.

Fluttershy lowered her head, mane covering half her face in utter disgrace. “Oh, I'm ever so sorry Applejack, Rainbow Dash! Um, I was just so happy... I shouldn't have screamed like that, and, um, I most definitely shouldn't have spied on you.” the pony looked up at the couple pitifully with her uncovered eye.

Pinkie Pie threw herself to the ground in front of Rainbow Dash. “I'm sooo sorry, Dashie! The suspense totally was killing me! Do you know how long I've been holding on to my 'Congratulations Rainbow Dash x Applejack!!' party banners? Months! **Moooonnthsss!**”

Ignoring Pinkie Pie's freakish contingency planning, the farmer turned to Trixie. “Well? Ain'tcha gonna apologize?”

The Great and Powerful Trixie, who had been standing to the side and looking at the scenery, faced the earth pony with surprise in her eyes. “Apologize to... Trixie's friends?”

Applejack raised an eyebrow in confusion. “Uh yeah, ya know, the ones ya'll were spyin' on durin' a real intimate-like moment?”

Trixie smiled from ear to ear, schoolfilly giddiness coursing through her body. “Yes! Trixie **will** apologize, for it is her duty as a Friend to, to her Friends!” Stepping up to the couple, the azure mare reared up and kicked her forelegs excitedly. “Applejack and Pegasus! Friends! Trixie is Sorry!” she announced gleefully.

Applejack raised her other eyebrow. "Huuokay... Uh, apology accepted, Ah guess? We was gon' tell you guys anyways, ya'll didn't need to sneak around like that."

"Still it was so cool and romantic!" Pinkie hopped happily in place. "And who knew Rainbow Dash could blush so red! Just look at 'er, guys! No wonder Applejack likes her so much, she looks like a pony-shaped apple!"

Rainbow Dash blushed further as the security guard oh-so-helpfully pointed the flashlight at her; this could destroy her awesome reputation! She needed to divert this mushy attention elsewhere- she needed a scapegoat or... 'A scapehorse!' The pegasus grinned, looking at The Great and Powerful Trixie with an evil glint in her eye. "Hey hey hey! What're you guys fussin' about? I already got the girl," the pegasus used her colorful tail to whip Applejack's haunches, '..shouldn't we be concentrating on Trixie and her Twilight-rut?"

The flashlight's spotlight quickly switched to the scandalized unicorn- in the darkness, a certain farmer smacked a certain pegasus upside the head so hard it almost rearranged the colors of her mane.

One hoof in the air and mouth hanging open, the showmare in question blushed deeply. "Trixie's Twilight-what?!"

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"S'too early Spike..." Twilight Sparkle murmured softly as she felt someone nudging her gently, chasing away her dreams. The unicorn would've ignored the intrusion upon her comfortable respite, but the smell of a delicious breakfast quickly reached her nose and lingered there, teasing her with the promise of deliciousness if she would just get up out of bed.

Opening her eyes, Twilight Sparkle was treated to the sight of a large, unfamiliar room; and that was just the half she could see, as she lay there on her side. The nightstand was much farther than the one back at her treehouse- this bed was expansive, to say the least. It was also insanely comfortable- the librarian wondered if it was made from pegasus down. The side of the room she was facing had a wall-to-wall window currently covered by a curtain, but the soft, white glow around it indicated that it was already morning.

Twilight stretched happily- she felt incredibly well-rested, unlike the morning of her first hangover. Turning over to her other side, the smile quickly ran away from her face as her blush made a triumphant return. Next to the bed, magically floating a tray full of food, stood a smiling, equally-blushing blue unicorn.

“G-g-good morning, Twilight Sparkle-”

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Outside of Trixie's room, the showmare's new friends and co-conspirators stood at the door, ears pressed against it. “Do you think she's gonna like it?” whispered the pink party pony.

“Like it? Shoot Hun, Ah cooked that myself! She's gon' love it!”

“Oh my, I hope so, Trixie was so nervous...”

“Pshh, c'mon! Twilight's been pathetically pinin' after that pony for months now!”

“Just like you with AJ, Dashie!”

The muffled explosion, the shattering noises, and the screaming that buffeted the door quickly silenced any objection Rainbow Dash was going to raise against Pinkie Pie.

Pinkie Pie's eyes sparkled. “Wow, they must be really going at it!”

Chapter 10

Breakfast in Bed

Cheerilee hummed softly to herself as she set the teakettle on the stove. Yawning, the grape-colored pony arched her back and stretched her hooves; trying to put the Cutie Mark Crusaders to bed had been... an adventure, to say the least. The teacher had found it difficult to deny Rarity's babysitting request after getting a good look at the well-armed stylist; she had found it even more difficult to keep the young fillies tucked in- Cheerilee wondered what was it about the Everfree Forest that attracted the girls so readily.

Hearing the sudden ruckus coming from upstairs, the earth pony smiled wearily. 'And now they're awake again.' Cheerilee really had to wonder what sort of power source was nestled within each of the Crusaders- looking at the clock on her kitchen wall, 7am, she realized that the girls had only slept for two, perhaps three hours, yet they were already up and back on the path to material ruin and destruction. Setting the table for four, the teacher placed a large plate full of sandwiches in the middle of it, as well as a jar of apple juice and four glasses. Making her way to the front door, she could hear her young charges running down the stairs, screaming something she didn't quite make out but that apparently involved anesthesiology and magnetic pulse welding.

Cheerilee stepped outside of the house and picked up the morning paper; she felt surprisingly well rested despite having spent most of the night braving the Everfree Forest's special brand of terror; the mare preferred to ignore her inner-filly, who had actually enjoyed the thrill of being chased around by Manticores and Basilisks. Coming back inside, she found the Cutie Mark Crusaders hungrily and messily devouring the breakfast she had laid out for them. Placing the newspaper on the table, she smiled at the young ponies. "Quite the appetite you girls have!" With a spring in her step, the teacher trotted back to the stove to check on the teakettle.

"WHOA!"

"RARITY?!"

"NO WAY!"

Cheerilee turned her attention back to the Crusaders, who were standing on the table, excitedly hovering over the newspaper. "Girls! Hooves off the table!" Quickly making her way over to them, she scowled at the fillies that seemed to be ignoring her. "Girls! Off the table, now!" she lightly stamped her hoof.

"Your sister looks so awesome!"

"She shore is givin' them city folk a what-for!"

"RARITY?!"

Dread befell the mulberry-colored mare; she had the sinking feeling that her childhood friend's evident appearance on the news was not fashion-related. Cheerilee used her head to nudge Scootaloo to the side, and then directed her attention to the paper on the table.

Cheerilee felt faint- there on the cover was a large, grainy picture of a beautiful white unicorn, her back to the camera, but thanks to that indigo mane unmistakable to those who knew her. The pictured pony was reared up on her hind legs, forelegs kicking wildly in the air, if the blurring was any indication. Out of her weaponized horn pulsed a large white ring of light, its ripple having apparently picked up and tossed a number of security ponies. 'WARMARE ON THE WARPAT' read the headline; the flower-flanked pony had to sit down before she collapsed.

"The unir... unidentefyied mare..."

"That's 'unidentified', Apple Bloom." corrected the teacher out of habit as she stared at the ceiling, not sure what to think or do.

The red-maned filly smiled at her teacher as she began reading again. "Right, that! 'The underidentified mare was taken into police custody for 17 counts of aggur... aggrababiated assault with magic..."

Cheerilee covered her eyes with one of her hooves. "'Aggravated'."

"That's what Ah said!" complained the filly, pushing Scootaloo away when the orange pegasus stuck her head close to the newspaper to look at the picture. "'...an' 25 counts of abbreviated assault an' batteries!"

Scootaloo's eyes shone with admiration. "She hit them with batteries?! Man, your sister is almost as cool as Rainbow Dash!"

Sweetie Belle's chest swelled with pride. She knew her sister was talented, and smart, and pretty, but cool? Rainbow Dash Cool? "Well that's to be expected- she's my sister, after all!"

Cheerilee picked up Sweetie Belle from the table and sat her down on the chair next to her. "Girls, becoming a felon is not 'cool'! Sweetie Belle, what your sister has done is nothing to cheer about..." She lightly stoked the filly's mane.

Sweetie Belle quickly swatted away the comforting hoof. "But she's doing it to save Twilight!" huffed the filly, crossing her forelegs.

"Yeah!" Apple Bloom turned her head to face the teacher. "Ain't you always tellin' us how important it is to help yer friends?"

Scootaloo picked up the paper and showed it to Cherilee once more. "And besides, did you not **see** the picture? So cool!"

The schoolteacher stared at her young students, not really sure how to respond to them. Looking at the picture once more reminded Cheerilee of one undeniable fact- the white pony's ferocity when protecting her friends had not waned in all these years. Cheerilee ventured a smile as she recalled her own youth, and all her escapes to the Everfree Forest with her unicorn friend from school.

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"So you tellin' me, instead of writin' a love letter or sendin' her flowers, ya'll wrote her a love movie?"

That must have been the longest elevator wait and elevator ride in Trixie's life. "Trixie did not write a love movie!" The mortified unicorn's blush now competed with the cyan pegasus's earlier one.

Said pegasus gave the showmare a good-natured shove. "Pffft! C'mon! The movie's called 'The Brave and Beautiful Glitter Dawn'! Helloooo?"

Trixie turned her nose up and closed her eyes. "All ponies appearing in this movie are fictitious. Any resemblance to real ponies is purely coincidental." She couldn't believe Miss Spelling had not made Rainbow Dash sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement.

Applejack smirked; Rainbow Dash had been giving Trixie a hard time all the way from the Observation Deck to the apartment, which they were now getting back to. "Glitter Dawn, eh? This's just me takin' wild guesses here but, that there name sounds mighty familiar..."

"Ooh! Ooh! Does it remind you of Fluttershy?" asked the party pony, raising her hoof excitedly.

Fluttershy giggled airily. "Um, I don't think it's me, Pinkie Pie."

Rainbow Dash lazily brought a hoof around Trixie's neck as the showmare unlocked the apartment door with her card key. "C'mon Trix, you can totally tell us how much you looooooooooove Twi, we're all friends here!" the acrobat waved her hoof towards the rest of the ponies.

The Great and Powerful Trixie turned to the light-blue pony, eyebrow hitched up high. "Trix?"

Rainbow Dash smirked. "What, you want me to call you by your full name? Cause I totally saw it in the contract, B-"

Trixie quickly held the rainbow-maned pegasus's mouth closed with magic. "Trix will be just fine, Pegasus... Er, Rainbow Dash."

Pinkie Pie hopped happily into the apartment, quickly making her way to the kitchen table where all the alcohol was still laid out. "So you are going to tell us how much you looooooooooove Twilight?" she asked, filling up five shot glasses.

"Trixie..." Trixie could feel everypony's eyes on her as she turned away and made her way to one of the large sofas in the living room. "Trixie respects Twilight's... Magic." The azure mare sat on the plush sofa, her back to the kitchen as she faced the large window that made up the outer wall of the apartment.

Unfortunately for her, the penthouse's bright lighting, combined with the nighttime darkness outside, effectively made the wall-to-wall window a large mirror that reflected back the shy, blushing face Trixie was trying to hide. Trixie

knew this because she could see not only her reflection, but also the reflection of four ponies looking back at her with apple-eating grins. Trixie could only stare wide-eyed at the window.

“Alright pardner.” Applejack chuckled, trotting towards the sofa. “Ah think we can help you win Twilight's... Respect.” The farmer took a seat close to the armrest of a second sofa, this one placed at a 90-degree angle from the armrest of the large sofa the showmare was occupying. ‘Not like it's gonna be that hard, anyways!’ Mused the draft pony.

Trixie, who was having a hard time meeting Applejack's gaze, turned to her right when she felt someone gently take seat next to her. Fluttershy smiled softly at the unicorn. “That is, if you wish for us, to um, assist you.”

Trixie felt a hoof quickly wrap around her neck and pull her into a half hug. “Oh dude, she's gonna respect you so hard when we're through with you, Trix!” Trixie could smell the alcohol in Rainbow Dash's breath- she had to marvel at this group's speed when it came to imbibing.

“I'm gonna have to make new banners soon!” Pinkie Pie walked to the sofa, balancing on her head a tray full of tall drinking glasses- each one was filled to the brim, and two of them actually had small shot glasses submerged in their contents. Every drink was different and color-coded to match each pony present- Trixie had to admit that they looked downright amazing.

The Great and Powerful Trixie decided not to comment on the fact that the glass apparently assigned to her was a lavender drink that faded into dark blue towards the top, with a magenta and purple straw. “Trixie is... willing to accept... assistance.” she replied, closing her eyes and taking a sip of her drink. She could feel the ponies grinning at her.

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“So, so then, then one'f these little brrats aks... asks Trrrixie, 'Is Twilight Sparrkle yourrr Special Frriend?' in, in frront of the whole crrrowd!” The Great and Powerful Trixie guffawed, throwing her head back, her hooves at either side of her around Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash in a friendly embrace; both ponies were also laughing drunkenly with her.

Applejack was kneeling at the coffee table banging her hoof loudly on it, her head down and cradled by her other foreleg. “Whooee!” she exclaimed,

raising her head and revealing tears of laughter around her eyes. "That little pony had you all fig'erd out!"

"Trrixie had to 'splain to hurr and to the whole ah, audience that it was all just a show, not a trrrue storrry!" Trixie used her magic to unsteadily bring her 12th shot to the general direction her mouth. After a few attempts, she managed to take it to her lips, quickly downing it. "That little filly starr'd at Trrrixie for the rrrest of the show! She didn't believe Trrrixie!"

Peals of laughter filled the air as Pinkie Pie hopped back from the kitchen, balancing four more trays full of drinks.

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"And... Ish not f-fairr!" The Great and Powerful Trixie cried while hugging a blubbering Rainbow Dash. Both were being hugged by a weeping Fluttershy. "I means... I... Trrrixie already made uh, a shtupid shhhow about you! Ish like, get out of my head, you stupid unicorm! L-let me shleep! Stop-stop lookin' forr me!"

Applejack covered her eyes with her hooves as she wept softly, laying face up under the coffee table, hiding from the glare of the apartment's lighting. "So sad, ya'll... Iff'in only we'd known..." The orange pony hiccup-burped. "...we woulda help'd ya'll a lot sooner!"

Empathic sorrow filled the room as Pinkie blew her nose with a napkin, somehow managing not to drop her tray.

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Trixie's eyes fluttered open as the bright sunlight coming from the apartment's window felt like it was singeing her face. The pounding in her head had a punishing intensity she could feel throughout her whole body. She felt trapped, for some reason. Her blurry vision slowly came back into focus, and it focused on an unamused baby dragon standing before her.

"You guys are just as bad as Twi." The dragon crossed his arms.

The Great and Powerful Trixie could not for the life of her remember this purple thing's name. "Whah... What did you do to your face...?" asked the showmare hoarsely, her throat utterly dry.

Spike's thin pupils shrank. "W-what do you mean?"

Trixie tried to move, but turning her head she came to realize that she had four ponies spooning her. Apparently, all five of them had somehow ended up under the coffee table, surrounded by empty bottles, cups, glasses, and cans. "Hgnnr..." she weakly tried to squeeze out from the pony embrace without much success. "Bathroom. Mirror." she deadpanned, turning back to Spike, shakily pointing down a hallway.

The dragon quickly padded down said hallway, checking each door until he found the bathroom, before promptly stepping inside. Even with the door closed, his scream woke up everypony in the drunken pile.

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Spike sat in the kitchen sink, sniffing as Fluttershy scrubbed him firmly with a large wire brush, sparks flying off of his hard scales. At some point during the night, the group of giggling, drunken ponies- permanent markers in mouth- had walked into the bedroom the young dragon had been put to bed in after the office meeting. As the artist of the most offensive and tasteless body graffiti- the beautiful cursive a dead giveaway- Fluttershy had volunteered to wash the poor dragon before Twilight woke up and reported them to Celestia for immediate banishment.

After very cold showers and Pinkie's Patented Prairie Pony hangover remedy, everypony had gathered at the kitchen, where Applejack and Pinkie Pie quickly set to work on making a grand breakfast.

"You want Twilight eating out of the sole of your hoof, what better way than to feed her for reals?" grinned Rainbow Dash, projecting confidence towards the unicorn sitting across from her at the kitchen table.

"Er..."

Fluttershy, still hard at work erasing Spike's unwanted markings, turned to face the unicorn as well. "Rainbow Dash is right, um, Trixie- whenever my little

Angel is feeling grumpy, I just put a nice carrot in his cuddly paws and he instantly becomes my very best friend!” the yellow pegasus blinked. “Oh! Um, you guys are also, um, my best friends... I meant, um, best critter friend...”

“An' my cookin's definitely gon' to earn you lots and lots of respect!” grinned the farmer-turned-cook, handling three different pans, all filled with french toasts.

“After breakfast, you should totally take Twilight out and show her the city!” Pinkie Pie added copious amounts of strawberry syrup to the large stack of chocolate-chip pancakes she had just made. “And then, and then you should take her to the movies and-” Trixie flinched, and Pinkie Pie grinned sheepishly. “-uh, on second thought, how about a visit to the park?”

Rainbow Dash flapped her wings excitedly. “Aw dude, that's an awesome idea! We'll make a picnic basket for you guys!”

“Perhaps later, um, after the picnic and after the meeting... Perhaps you could take Twilight Sparkle out to dinner?” Fluttershy inspected her handiwork- Spike's scales were so clean each one was like a miniature purple mirror. “All done!” she smiled at the dragon, who still looked quite grumpy.

The Great and Powerful Trixie looked around herself at each of the ponies in the kitchen. “Did the lot of you just suggest that Trixie spend her entire day feeding Twilight Sparkle to gain her... respect?”

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Twilight stretched happily- she felt incredibly well rested, unlike the morning of her first hangover. Turning over to her other side, the smile quickly ran away from her face as her blush made a triumphant return. Next to the bed, magically floating a tray full of food, stood a smiling, equally-blushing blue unicorn.

“G-g-good morning, Twilight Sparkle-”

The lavender unicorn's body reacted on instinct as her magic quickly flared. All of the previous day's memories quickly rushed back in to her once-peaceful mind; the letter, the carriage ride, the mare she longed for, the incident,

the suffocating meeting room, Rainbow Dash, Trixie's manipulation, and most prominently, Applejack's words. The things she had insinuated. "**NO!**" shouted the librarian as every light bulb in the room quickly sparked to life brighter than possible before quickly exploding.

Trixie stepped back, eyes wide. "Uh, d-do you not... like pancakes?" the showmare shrieked and dropped the tray when the stack of pancakes exploded as well, covering her in syrup and crumbs. The plates and the glass of juice shattered as they hit the floor. "What is the matter with-!"

"Why why why **why**?!" Twilight stood on all fours on the bed, horn pointed at Trixie, tears flowing. 'How could I be in love with her! She hasn't changed one bit!'

Trixie's own horn started glowing with magic- she wasn't sure what the apparently insane lavender pony might make explode next. "Why what?" asked the azure mare, unsure of where Twilight was going with her little magic outburst. Looking at the wasted food scattered on the floor, she turned back to the bookworm. "The breakfast? Is it the breakfast? Trixie just wanted to do something nice for-"

"No! You are **not** nice! I wanted to believe you were- but everypony was right about you!!" How much time had she spent searching for this unicorn? Applejack had been right, Twilight realized; her searches had become more than mere worrying for the safety of the showmare. "I spent **months** looking for you! I wanted us to be... to be friends!" the blue-maned pony blushed despite herself.

Trixie sighed- this was not going as she had hoped. "Look, Trixie knew that you were following her but-"

"**YOU KNEW?!"** Twilight let out a scream as she magically picked up a pillow and flung it at Trixie, who was too slow to react to the cuddly projectile.

The fluffy kinetic energy imparted upon her face was powerful enough to cause Trixie to do a full flip backwards, landing on her hooves again, slightly dazed. Trixie briefly considered that she should have held on to that last bit of information. "Throwing pillows at Trixie?! That is real mature!" Using her magic, the showmare picked up the same pillow and swung it in a wide horizontal arc, smacking Twilight's face with it.

Twilight was mostly unfazed as she used her magic to try to wrest control of the pillow from Trixie. Horns glowing, the pillow floated in the air, pulsating with white and pink energy as both unicorns tried to take possession of it. "If... If you knew, then WHY?! Why did you run from me?!" the lavender pony's voice strained with her effort.

The Great and Powerful Trixie was starting to sweat as she tried her hardest to pull on the pillow. "Why... why were you chasing me in the... in the first place?!" Trixie could feel Twilight's magic permeating the room; it felt nearly oppressive and it was a small wonder she could hold out as long as she was doing.

The tug-of-war ended abruptly as the pillow simply burst from the pressure, showering the entire room in feathers. The loud explosion only stunned Twilight Sparkle for a few seconds, before she picked up another pillow. "I asked you first! Why would you do that- do you like to make me suffer?!" There was no other explanation- Twilight's mind raced as she remembered all the sleepless nights she spent tracking down a pony that apparently didn't want to be found.

Trixie quickly blasted the incoming pillow with magic, turning into a mass of rose petals that started raining down on Twilight Sparkle. The deep blue unicorn stared wide-eyed at the crying pony in front of her. "Why would you suffer over Trixie?"

Twilight glared at the showmare. "Why aren't you answering my question?"

The Great and Powerful Trixie looked into Twilight's deep, purple eyes. They were still full of pain, just like the day before, when she had disappeared from the office. 'Why do you even care? Why did you come looking for me? We only met once before, you stupid filly!' Trixie almost let loose a chuckle at the hypocrisy of her own thoughts. 'That's right, we only met once before and I wrote a movie about you, so who's the stupid filly?'

Trixie came back from her thoughts only to realize Twilight Sparkle was walking past her and towards the door, sniffing quietly. The showmare was hit with a powerful sense of finality as she watched the lavender pony walk away. 'DON'T LET HER LEAVE!' screamed her mind, startling the silver-maned pony into action. Without even thinking it, The Great and Powerful Trixie used her magic to scoop up Twilight in a magic bubble and put her back on the bed.

"Trixie, I'm going." sniffed the unicorn sternly, dispelling the pink telekinesis surrounding her body.

"Trixie's new road show is called 'The Ballad of Twilight Sparkle'." blurted out the showmare.

Twilight, who was getting off the bed and was mid-jump, fell flat on her face. "Wha-"

Trixie's face flushed- of course she had to say the first thing on her mind. "It's all about some stupid pony from Nowhere, Equestria that just happens to be the most powerful unicorn in the land."

The lavender mare was still in her fallen position, front half on the floor, rear half on the bed. Both ponies were silent for a minute as the statement sunk into Twilight's head. "You... you made a show about me...?"

"Trixie would prefer not to go into the details, but yes, the title character bears passing resemblance to you." The blue unicorn tried to put on her best act of nonchalance.

Twilight let the rest of her body fall from the bed with a loud thump; she lay on her back, staring at Trixie from the floor. "You. Made a show. About me." the lavender pony's face was unreadable.

Trixie rolled her eyes. "Yes, did Trixie stutter or something? And just to make this clear, all of Trixie's shows are free, so she did not profit from your name." The showmare had no idea what was going through Twilight's mind at that moment, but Trixie certainly wished that the lavender pony would get up from her ridiculously cute position on the floor, legs up, bed-mane everywhere; it was terribly disarming- especially her eyes, now more curious than anything else.

"T-Trixie would like to add that in no way was your name slandered- in fact, Trixie made sure to always cast you in a positive light..." the azure mare blushed brightly. "Um, e-exceedingly so, some would say." The showmare began fidgeting. "E-enough that were somepony to view it out, out of context, that pony might arrive at certain misunderstandings, which is something that Trixie would prefer to avoid if possible. After all, Trixie couldn't help make you look so good!" the blue unicorn winced at the path her own rant had taken. "Because! Because T-Trixie's magnificent stage magic can make anypony look good, not um, only just you s-specifically- it just so happened that this specific

show is about you, so you ended up looking good, and after the way Trixie left Ponyville and then uh, if you saw Trixie's show and-

"Trixie!" Twilight Sparkle couldn't believe her ears- was The Great and Powerful Trixie rambling? 'Is she... nervous?' The librarian blinked. "Um, Trixie, did you avoid me... Because of what I might think of your show?" It never occurred to the bookworm that Trixie even knew how to feel embarrassed.

The blue unicorn's blush deepened considerably as she raised an anxious hoof. "W-well like, like I said, certain parts of the show could be misconstrued, and-

Twilight ventured a shy smile. "What happened to your illeism?"

Trixie turned her head from side to side, frantically inspecting her own body. "My what?" Trixie stopped her search when she heard the light, almost musical laughter that escaped from the lavender unicorn. The Great and Powerful Trixie's heart skipped a beat- she had never actually heard Twilight laughing. 'Um, wow.' The azure mare decided that she'd like to hear that again, and possibly once more after that as well.

"Trixie, were you afraid I wouldn't have liked it?" Twilight found the showmare's insecurity oddly charming- she took a step forward as Trixie took one step back. "Are you nervous because you care about my opinion?" Twilight's face reddened- she had almost asked something slightly different, as she again considered what Applejack had told her. 'How would I even know if I really **feel** that way?' The unicorn blinked. 'Duh! Time to do some research!'

The Great and Powerful Trixie's eyes widened as Twilight Sparkle's eyes, well, sparkled with determination. 'What just happened? Why are you smiling like that?'

Twilight hopped energetically towards the blue unicorn. "Trixie, can you take me to a library?"

"Whuh?"

"And after that, I want to see your show!"

Chapter 11

Pony Trainspotting

“No, no, no, NO.”

“Yes, yes, yes, yes, YES!”

The Great and Powerful Trixie opened the door with her magic; so involved in the argument that she didn't notice the quick sounds of shuffling and retreating hooves coming from the other side. “No!” She stamped her hoof for emphasis, but that did little to quell Twilight Sparkle's insistence... Or her bed-bouncing. 'Where did you get so much energy?! You were crying your eyes out a few moments ago!’

The showmare stepped out of the room, then walked down the hallway and into the kitchen where she was met with a poorly-constructed scene of normalcy: Rainbow Dash had her head buried in a magazine that she was holding upside-down; Applejack was pretending to drink from an obviously empty mug—she was even moving her throat as if she were actually gulping down her pretend coffee; Fluttershy was nervously washing a still-grumpy Spike in the kitchen sink even though he was already clean; Pinkie Pie was sitting in the middle of the kitchen hunched forward on a tall stool, right foreleg resting on her left rear leg and bent upwards at the elbow to support her chin as she stared at nothing, seemingly deep in thought.

Before Trixie could begin to comment on their terrible acting, Twilight bounced out of the room and began hopping circles around the blue unicorn while happily chanting “Yes-yes-yes-yes-yes!”

Trixie stared wide-eyed and slack-jawed at the merry lavender pony for the two minutes or so it took for her to stop her yessing and bouncing. Twilight Sparkle came to a halt at Trixie's side and threw her forelegs over the showmare's back playfully. “I don't hear a 'Nooooo!’” she giggled, before noticing the azure mare's silence. “Trixie? Are you going to show me? I really want to...” it was then that the bookworm noticed the four ponies staring at her. “...see... you are... you guys are... all here.”

Quickly realizing she was still half on top of Trixie, Twilight swiftly used her magic to physically and forcefully fling the blue unicorn back down the hallway. “H-HEY!” A loud crash reverberated within the apartment.

Wincing at the sound, the studious pony quickly recovered and tried to put on a casual, cheerful face despite her intense blushing. “G-good morning girls! W-what um, what a surprise to see you all here!”

Spike shooed Fluttershy away as he climbed out of the kitchen sink, dripping water everywhere. “Nuh-uh! Rarity's not here yet!”

Applejack chuckled. “Ain't you worry none 'bout Rarity, Spike- 'cordin to Miss Spelling, Rarity got 'erself booked someplace fancy after she couldn't get in to see lovergirl over here.”

“LOVER—” Twilight quickly turned back to check if The Great and Powerful Trixie was within earshot; peering down the hallway, she could see the door to the bedroom was on the floor and Trixie's hind legs were visible under the bed. “Lovergirl?!” whispered the lavender unicorn as she stepped close to the farmer. “AJ, did you tell everypony about what we talked about yesterday?”

“Course not, Twilight!” Applejack winked at the unicorn. “Ah don't have to tell nopony anything they done fig'ed out fer themselves!”

Twilight Sparkle's unruly bed-mane became infinitely more frazzled. “Ohmygosh GUYS!” The nervous nerd pony quickly looked back down the hallway again. “Ok, ok, OK! Look, I don't know what you guys **think** I may or may not feel about Trixie, but she can **NOT** find out!”

If Rainbow Dash were to smile any wider, she would need more face. “Find out what?”

Twilight turned to the colorful pegasus, eyes neurotically wide. “That I— that you guys think I like her! Promise me you won't say anything!” she hissed.

Pinkie Pie quickly hopped from her seat over to the lavender pony. “Ooh! Ooh! Can we Pinkie Pie Swear?”

Twilight's horn began to glow. “Yes! Yes you can! You have to!” Using her magic, she lifted everyone in the room and placed them in a small huddle around herself. “Go!”

Spike rolled his eyes and Fluttershy giggled as the group brought their right hooves (and claw) together at the center of the huddle, before beginning the chant. “Cross my heart and hope to fly, stick a cupcake in my eye!” finished the group, everyone performing the motions.

“OW!” Twilight quickly fell back from the group, landing on her haunches and covering her left eye with both hooves.

“Oh my, are you alright, Twilight?” Fluttershy broke from the group and knelt besides the downed unicorn.

“Geez Twi, stop hitting yourself!”

“Ain't that hard to do, Sug- ya'll are s'posed to close yer eye first!”

“Hi Trixie!” Pinkie waved happily at the pony just entering the kitchen. The pony in question seemed equal parts dazed and enraged as she unsteadily walked towards Twilight, horn glowing brightly.

Applejack turned to face the blue unicorn. “Ya know, I've been meanin' to ask, but... S'there any particular reason y'all first came out of that room tarred n' feathered?”

The Great and Powerful Trixie blinked—she didn't understand at first, but the horrified look of embarrassment on Twilight's face made the showmare quickly give herself a once-over. Pancake crumbs, chocolate chips, and strawberry syrup covered her mane, coat and tail; wherever there was syrup, pegasus down from the disintegrated pillow had stuck to her body. The silver-maned unicorn blushed as she glared at the explosive pony that caused it all. **“YOU DID TH—”**

“WOW SUCH A MESSY EATER YOU ARE, TRIXIE!” Twilight instantly teleported to Trixie's side, before picking her up with her magic. “You **really** could use a shower!” she chuckled nervously, quickly crossing the living room with Trixie in tow and making her way to the same bathroom Spike had made his body-art discovery an hour earlier.

All four ponies and one dragon stood in silence, looking towards the hallway both unicorns had disappeared to. Ten seconds is all it took for them to hear the bathroom door slam open, and a voice screaming loudly, “Out out out OUT!!” as Twilight Sparkle came into view again, magically flung from the bathroom, down the hallway, and into one of the walls of the living room. The

unicorn's body peeled off from the wall where it left a deep imprint, before doing a slow forward flip and landing in an upright sitting position on a sofa below.

Applejack and Rainbow Dash winced as Fluttershy and Spike quickly made their way to Twilight's side; a cheerful Pinkie Pie held up four large, square pieces of paper, each with a number written on it—10, 9.5, 5.5, and 9.0.

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Miss Spelling adjusted her glasses. “Forgive me fillies and gentlecolts, but considering the way the studio has handled the film thus far, I just can't comprehend the zealousness with which you are all clinging to what will probably amount to insignificant changes to the studio's profit.”

“Ms. Spelling, twenty percent is not an insignificant amount by any stretch of the imagination. These residual payments are unheard of!” The graying unicorn stallion in the business suit shook his head, looking disdainfully at the young orange unicorn mare sitting at the very end of the table full of shareholders and legal team members.

Miss Spelling lowered her head slightly as she rested her chin on her hooves, the sunlight coming in from the large windows somehow reflecting from her glasses and making them glare brightly at everypony present. “Taking into account the near-biographical nature of this film in relation to Ms. Twilight, I would say that her contract is more than fair for what amounts to her stake in this Intellectual Property.” The unicorn raised an eyebrow behind her bright spectacles. “Besides, I can't help but point out that if the studio was somehow worried about the profits this movie was going to make, they would have put more effort towards realizing and promoting this project.”

A second stallion, a pegasus with a strange, almost combed-over mane, spoke up. “Ms. Spelling, just what are you implying?”

“Mr. Baulking, I assure you that I am being quite explicit—I am stating that this film is being treated by Metro Goldmane Brayer as exactly what it is: a contractual obligation to the studio's independent film label and nothing more.” Miss Spelling leaned back into her seat, glasses still shining. “Ponies of the Board, let us not mince words here—I know full well that none of you wanted this movie to get made. It's been an uphill battle against all of you from day one because let's face it, you only needed a movie to be released—it didn't need to

be particularly successful for the studio to profit from it after taking advantage of Trottingham's film production tax breaks.”

“Miss Spe—”

“However, we are two months away from release and other than the billboards and posters that I personally managed to secure, I have not seen any real effort from the studio to promote this film in any way, shape or form, which leads me to believe that Metro Goldmane Brayer expects very little from this movie.” Miss Spelling used her magic to pour herself some water from the pitcher that was resting in the very middle of the table. Taking a drink, she continued. “And yet here you all are, pecking away at this contract like carrion-eaters fighting over the tiniest shreds of food in the desert. I'm sure you all worked very hard to bury this movie, so why are you trying so hard to make a profit out of it now?”

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Holly Diver leaned back into the plush booth at Spurbucks, sipping on her overpriced cup of iced mocha lavender and sunflower-seed coffee. She had been carrying the stupidest, most satisfied grin ever since she had left the shareholder meeting with Miss Spelling.

“Holly, I am not paying you to smile, you may stop at any moment.” The red-maned unicorn was currently face-down on the table, forelegs around her head, half-eaten slice of chocolate cake and unfinished hot chocolate besides her.

Holly Diver smiled even wider now—she knew full well that Spelling could feel the mirth radiating from the pegasus. “There's a lot of things I do for you that I don't get paid for.” She instantly caught the orange unicorn's barely perceptible twitch. “Missy, I know the only reason you're hiding your face is because you don't want to give me the satisfaction of seeing your smile, but if you don't finish your cake I'm gonna do it for you.”

Miss Spelling quickly raised her head and grabbed her plate, bringing it close to herself; she knew for a fact that Holly Diver never made idle threats about food. “I am willing to give you a 20% raise effective immediately and retroactive to the past six months if you forget what you saw today.”

“Not gonna happen.” the pegasus answered cheerily. “I thought that was pretty boss when you called those suits carrion-eaters... But afterward, that hour-long tirade about how unhappy and avaricious and Sunless they all were? Pure gold!” Taking a sip from her too-sweet coffee, she continued. “Oh, and that bit about how you were gonna stand them all up in a single file and then run the entire filmstrip in through their mouths and out the other end along the entire line of ponies—that was just classy right there! I didn't think you had the imagination!” The Ponytrain Projector was a mental image that was gonna stick with Holly Diver for the rest of her life.

Miss Spelling had her eyes closed as she quietly finished her cake. “Momentary lapse in judgment, I've been under a lot of stress with this movie. Frankly,” a sip of her tepid chocolate, “I'm surprised I didn't get fired right then and there.”

“I saw a couple of them crying on the way out... That might come back to bite you later.” Holly added, gauging the unicorn's expression.

“Is that so?” Miss Spelling asked, not realizing the tiny smile that was forming at the corners of her mouth.

- - -

“I don't understand Twilight, what're we doing in here?”

Twilight Sparkle used her magic to close the door to one of the smaller bedrooms in the penthouse apartment. This was the room where she had left her saddlebag the previous day, before she left with Trixie to join the contract meeting, and where the purple reptilian had apparently spent the night. “I need you to take a letter, Spike.” she answered, using her magic to float a pen and a legal pad towards Spike.

The young dragon flipped through the first few leaves. “What's with all the Applejack drawings?”

Twilight blushed. “Never you mind, Spike. Just use another page.”

“Okay...” Spike gave the unicorn a quizzical look as he found a blank page.

"Now, let us begin. 'Dear Princess Celestia, I write to you seeking counsel on matters of grave importance.'"

The scribe blinked. "Grave importance'? Seriously?"

"Spike, you are **writing** a letter, not editing one." Admonished the unicorn, ignoring the eye-roll thrown her way. "It has been brought to my attention that some of my friends have arrived at a most precipitous conclusion about myself—"

"Presi-whatsis?" Spike started chewing on the back of the pen.

"Pre-ci-pi-tous, Spike. Anyways, '...precipitous conclusion about myself based upon wholly unscientific observation of my past behavior pertaining to one specific pony that shall remain nameless.'" Twilight began pacing from side to side as she dictated. "Though hopelessly unprofessional and lacking any sort of rigor or qualitative research, my friends have nonetheless produced an unsubstantiated theory based mostly on conjecture."

Spike nodded. "Uh-huh." He had already given up trying to ask for clarifications most of the time, resorting to just writing the words as he heard them whenever Twilight got like this.

"They theorize that I have somehow developed feelings similar to friendship, but on a more personal, deeper level for this specific pony. They have based their supposition on the specific pony's disappearance, and my resultant search for the missing equine. Though laughable, the hypothesis is not entirely without merit; as such, I would like to pursue this investigation in a controlled, scientific manner—I trust that Your Highness may be able to impart some of her endless wisdom on how to best proceed with this experiment? Your student, always faithful, Twilight Sparkle."

"Oh brother... You know Twi, maybe you should just talk to Trixie about it..."

Twilight chuckled condescendingly as she pet the small dragon. "Oh Spike, that would ruin the control! Now c'mon, hurry up and send the letter." Spike rolled his eyes once again as he set fire to the leaf, watching the magical smoke escape the room by slipping under the door. A few moments later, both unicorn and dragon stepped out to join the rest of the ponies having breakfast in the kitchen. Twilight blinked. "Where's Rainbow Dash?"

A hat-less Applejack looked up from her plateful of pancakes. “Lil’ firebrand got called downstairs while y’all were in the room. Somethin’ about a request for her legal services.” the farmer shrugged, continuing on her breakfast.

“Huhwhat?”

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Police Officer Bobby Flat-Hoof yawned as he rubbed his eyes; after the previous day’s long hours, Detective Horseshoe had dragged him to the gym, where the bubblegum pink-maned mare had beat the ever-loving stuffing out of a poor, defenseless punching bag all night long. He had never seen the level-headed pony so worked up over a perp before; the mare was widely known for her Luna-may-care attitude—every little thing just seemed to slide off of her impossibly cool shoulders.

It was morning now and he had just gotten the message that the perp’s attorney had been brought in to the station a few minutes ago. Making his way around the numerous desks and down the stairs to the front desk, he could see his partner chatting away with a very colorful pegasus pony in a cowpony hat. ‘Nopony’s ever gonna mistake **her** in a police line-up!’

“C’mon, you gotta tell me, I told you mine!”

Gummie chuckled—she loved comparing scar stories. “Alright, alright... It was my first day on the force, and we were chasing this pegasus purse snatcher—he thought he was gonna get away, but I had climbed to the roof of a nearby building when I saw him commit the crime.” The detective was energetically mimicking the same actions she was recounting. “As I expected, the criminal took flight as soon as he saw my partner chasing after him down the street—but the perp never expected an earth pony to get the jump on him from above!”

Flat-Hoof finished his trot down the flight of stairs and joined the two lively mares. “Not that story again, Horseshoe...” the dark blue stallion shuddered. “...I still have nightmares about it.”

The detective pony brought a hoof to her aviator shades and lowered them a bit, eyes peeking out over them, eyebrow raised. "Don't be such a gelding, Flat-Hoof! It was just a little blood!"

The officer paled a bit. "It was most of your blood, Gummie!"

Rainbow Dash's eyes were sparkling with worship. "Most of your blood? Oh man, that is so cool!"

Detective Horseshoe blew a large gum bubble before letting it pop. "Yes, yes it was."

Officer Flat-Hoof rolled his eyes. "Right, if you ladies are done comparing the size of your brushes with death, we still have a pony to interrogate." The serious earth pony turned and started making his way down a hallway that led deeper into the first floor of the police station.

"Yeah yeah..." Deadpanned Horseshoe, as both she and Rainbow Dash turned to follow him. "Don't let him fool you..." Gummie turned back to wink at the pegasus. "...He likes to act like Equestria's most boring cop, but if you knew the crazy bull—"

"Gummie!"

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Rarity watched in annoyance as Rainbow Dash's smile grew wider and wider. They were sitting in the bleak interrogation room again, where the unicorn had been given a small amount of time to talk with her 'attorney' before the interrogation. The reason for the pegasus's deepening smile was the copy of the police report filed on Rarity's arrest that she had been given—it seemed to be greatly entertaining to the cyan pony.

Rainbow Dash looked up from the stack of papers she was reading. "Rare, I know I don't usually say this but..." The pegasus blushed slightly. "Laying waste to a battalion of rent-a-cops? I..." The pegasus bit her lip. "...I'm proud to be your friend."

Rarity's eyes became wall-eyed for a moment; the honest sentiment had caught her completely off-guard. "B-behaving like a ruffian is no reason to be proud of—"

"So!" Interrupted the pegasus, "Did you see a judge about your bail? I think getting out on your own recognizance is probably a no-go, but this is probably your first offense, right? Or, do you get into huge brawls often?" Rainbow Dash's eyes sparkled once again. "Oh dude, are you part of an underground rodeo club that meets every week just to duke it out because you all feel disenfranchised and alienated by society?"

The unicorn looked completely scandalized at the suggestion. "Rainbow Dash, where are you getting these ridiculous ideas from? Have you been listening to Pinkie Pie's stories again?" Rarity cleared her throat as she sought to calm herself down. She reminded herself that she had decided to ask for Rainbow Dash's help out of her own volition. "As for your original question, yes, bail has been set for me—and what a dreadful experience this has been!"

"Pfft, tell me about it! Hey, have you tried using magic with that thing on?" asked the pegasus, pointing at the brace that encircled her horn and neck.

Rarity had almost started getting used to the thing; it had been attached to her as soon as she had been arrested and it had not been taken off since. "I have not, R—"

"Good! ...Don't. That thing is just gonna send the magic back into you... I've heard it hurts like an applebucker." Rainbow Dash leaned back into her uncomfortable chair. "Anyways, I've got money to pay for your bail, and I **know** you'd never do anything like this..." The pegasus tapped the police report in front of her, "...without reason, so how about we get this interrogation thing done so we can get you to an arraignment?"

Rarity looked at Rainbow Dash with extreme confusion. There was something very, very wrong here, and it wasn't just the fact that the unicorn had been wrongfully detained. She had chosen the pegasus because she was the only one available at the moment—Rarity had not been expecting any sort of competence to come from the simple-minded acrobat, yet here she was, talking Rarity through the motions, almost as if... Rarity blinked when the realization blindsided her. "Rainbow Dash... You've been arrested before, haven't you?"

Rainbow Dash's sudden twitch sent the papers she was holding flying off the table. "WHA- huh, what? I... Pffftt, that's not... Who told you... I mean, define 'arrested'?" she chuckled nervously.

Chapter 12

It's Not a Date

“So, what do you think?” Officer Bobby Flat-Hoof grimaced as he sipped on his coffee, or what the vending machine falsely advertised as 'coffee'. He sat at one of the small wooden tables in one of the break rooms at the police station—a room that was about as luxurious as the holding cells, and where the machines tended to be stocked with food and drinks that would violate a prisoner's rights to fair treatment. “On the one hoof, her story checks out with the medical reports—all the injuries were relatively minor and most of those ponies went back to work the same day—not something you'd expect if they had been attacked with swords.”

Detective Gummie Horseshoe riffled through her jacket's pockets, looking for change as she glowered at the beat-up vending machine with the large logo down its front; a logo that hadn't been used by that particular soft drink company in at least 35 years. “Don't tell me you actually believe all that stuff about fashion accessories!” The gray mare's eyebrows arched over her ever-present shades. “Or is she too pretty to go to jail? I thought you already had a girl, Flat-Hoof.”

The stallion produced some bits from his uniform pocket and placed them on the table, sliding them towards his partner. “What, you think I'm gonna make a pass at her? C'mon, after seeing how much you like her?”

Gummie stamped her hoof on top of the change, hitting the table loudly. “Funny.” she deadpanned, sliding the bits off from the table and into her other hoof.

“Thanks. Look, all I'm saying is, we took some statements from the guards, but this investigation's not over until we interrogate all of them.”

The detective shrugged as she made her selection on the vending machine. “Yeah well, forgive me for not siding with the thoroughly armed nutjob on this one.” Gummie started pressing the button for her selection repeatedly when she noticed that the machine had not produced her cherished soda. “I mean, she said so herself that some Trixie character was trying to seduce her friend!” The gray mare turned around on the spot, her tail towards the machine. “It's kinda obvious that she's just a crazy, jealous filly trying to dock-block her ex-

lover.” Detective Horseshoe kicked her hind legs at the vending machine, making it slam into the wall behind, the sound reverberating across the room.

Another sip of coffee. “It's all sold out, Horseshoe.” Flat-Hoof tilted his chair back as he put his rear legs on the table, his eyes almost completely covered by his cap as it fell forward over his face. “It's been sold out for the past two weeks.”

Gummie harshly kicked the coin return button on the machine. “...Stupid budget cuts... Then why were **you** able to get a stupid drink?” The mare deftly pocketed the change.

The stallion shrugged. “I'm fairly sure I'm the only pony here in the station that drinks this stuff.” he answered, taking one final gulp and shuddering lightly. A single tear escaped his eye as the vile liquid intruded upon his body. “It's not very good coffee; the machine must still be practically full of it.”

Both ponies turned their heads at the sound of the door opening—another pony of the law came into the room to join the pair. “Horseshoe, Flat-Hoof, I think we may have a positive ID on the suspect's vehicle—the eye-witness descriptions match that of a vehicle that was towed late last night in the downtown area.” The forest-green unicorn stepped closer to the table, floating some papers close to her head with telekinetic magic.

Flat-Hoof blinked and gave a wry smile as Horseshoe took off her shades and faced the unicorn. “Really? You guys were somehow able to pick out the one hot-air balloon in an impound lot full of carriages? I'm impressed.”

The unicorn looked slightly embarrassed as she sheepishly turned to Officer Flat-Hoof. “...It's got a Canterlot registration, but it doesn't seem to be stolen; there aren't any reports on it being missing.” she said, flipping through the papers and avoiding the Detective mare's mocking gaze.

Nudging his cap up and away from his eyes, Flat-Hoof dropped his rear legs off from the table and then leaned across it. “Any weapons or anything unusual in the basket?” asked the stallion, holding out his upturned hoof towards his partner.

The green mare shook her head. “Nothing... The balloon didn't even have a burner or gas tanks.”

Detective Horseshoe glared at her partner as she reached into her pockets for her ill-begotten change. "Whose name is the thing registered under? The suspect's?"

The unicorn officer winced a bit as she floated the papers down to the table. "It's uh, it's registered to Princess Celestia."

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"So yeah... Two years of my life I am never getting back, but hey, it got me a swanky house, so I guess I can't complain." Rainbow Dash shrugged as she leaned back on the park bench, putting the half-chewed popsicle stick back in her mouth.

The freshly-bailed Rarity sat in stunned silence next to the pegasus, her hooves covered in the melted ice-cream she had stopped paying attention to half an hour before; below her, a trail of ants surrounded the ice-cream that had dripped to the ground. She felt a headache coming on—this was entirely too much information to process.

Sure, the unicorn wasn't completely surprised to learn that without Fluttershy's influence, the young Rainbow Dash had quickly spiraled out of Flight Camp and into juvenile delinquency, but the rest of her story was just absolutely incredible **and** ridiculous. How many repeat offenses do you need to commit to actually become friends with your court-appointed lawyer? Perhaps more tellingly was what happened when Rainbow Dash was legally prohibited from flying—all her boundless energy was suddenly redirected to fervent studying, of all things.

'Had nothing better to do.' was how the pegasus had shrugged it all off, but Rarity suspected that Rainbow Dash's diligent turnabout came from a passionate necessity to earn back her freedom—the dressmaker couldn't even begin to imagine what it must have felt for that young blue filly to have her wings bound so soon after tearing the Sonic Rainboom out from the pages of pony myth and bringing it into reality.

Those bindings would not last, of course—the driven pony had made sure to rise to the challenge set before her and proved she could straighten up and fly right, so to speak. Rarity was slightly miffed—not jealous, for that would be

unladylike—at the fact that Rainbow Dash had gotten a better education than her! The indigo-maned mare turned to her friend. “Rainbow Dash, then why... Well, why are you a Weather Pony now?”

The pegasus quickly turned to face the unicorn, looking slightly offended. “Hey! That's a totally important job!”

Rarity flinched. “Oh, I'm sorry Darling, I didn't mean it like that—it's just... Well, you could be so much more—“

The acrobat spit out the stick as she jumped from the bench. “Ugh! C'mon Rare!” Rainbow Dash flapped her wings, entering a low hover in front of the unicorn. “That boring, schooly stuff isn't what I do!”

Rarity watched as the pegasus quickly blasted into the sky, brazenly carving a rainbow trail all the way to the spire of the Clydesler Building a few miles away—the scattered clouds in the sky dissipated around the pegasus, and the sky itself seemed to be getting a brighter, deeper blue behind her. 'Is she cutting through the smog?' The cyan pegasus circled the spire three times before carving a second rainbow trail back to Median Park. The seamstress had to chuckle as her friend skidded to a halt in front of her. 'Ten seconds flat.' she mused.

“See? **That's** what I do, and I'm the best at what I do!” exclaimed the acrobat as the dust from her landing settled around her.

Rarity gave her friend a genuine smile. “I know you are, Rainbow Dash, I was there when you got the trophy.”

Rainbow Dash returned the smile with confidence. “Besides, I already forgot all that college stuff after that stupid exam they made me take—I made sure to clean out all that useless crud from my head in—“

“Ten seconds flat?” Giggled the white pony as she got up from the park bench.

The pegasus winked. “Now you're gettin' it!”

“I suppose I am, Rainbow Dash.” said Rarity quite truthfully, her reservations about the pegasus's chosen path already leaving her. Looking down at her ice-cream covered hooves, she frowned. “Come on, let's see if we can find some place where I can wash off this mess.” Rarity began trotting down

the small trail that crossed through the wooded area of the park. It was a fairly secluded spot, and nearly as peaceful as Ponyville—quite the contrast to the city surrounding Median Park. The fashionista's thoughts drifted again to the pegasus that she was seeing in a new light; Rarity mentally chided herself for not having taken an interest in really, truly getting to know Rainbow Dash before. 'Perhaps a weekly spa session is in order!'

“Hey uh, Rare?”

“Yes?” Rarity turned to her side, facing the pegasus that was flying a short distance from the ground at the unicorn's walking pace.

The acrobat's eyes flickered from side to side, almost as if she were scanning for eavesdroppers, “I meant what I said back at the station... About you being kinda, kind of a cool friend.” Rainbow Dash stopped beating her wings, landing on her hooves next to the white pony with a soft thud. “Thanks for not letting me give up on Applejack.” she said, lightly hitting Rarity's shoulder with her hoof.

Rarity's eyes widened as giddiness coursed through her body—new couple, new gossip! “So I was right about Applejack? Was she afraid and confused about her feel—”

“PFFFFT! No!” Guffawed the pegasus. “That mare can't get enough of me!” Rainbow Dash took a moment to flex her foreleg, admiring her muscles lovingly. “I mean, not that I can blame her.”

Rarity's admiration for her friend quickly deflated as she raised an eyebrow at the rainbow-maned wonder. Before the unicorn could say anything, she noticed that a number of ponies were running through the woods and heading in the opposite direction as the pair from Ponyville. They all seemed to be so excited about whatever was happening behind Rarity and Rainbow Dash that the seamstress had to stop one of them out of curiosity. “Um, excuse me, sir... Is something the matter?”

“Oh my gosh, didn't you see it?!” The earth pony was actually in tears as he stopped his gallop to face the two mares.

Rarity and Rainbow Dash exchanged a confused look. “Uh...”

"It's a double rainbow!" The pony was actually shuddering and as he cried. "It's a full-on double rainbow all the way to the Clydesler Building! What does it mean?!"

Both mares backed away from the emotional pony as he continued on towards the bench that they had vacated a few minutes ago. Taking a closer look at their surroundings, Rainbow Dash and Rarity noticed that all of the ponies around them seemed equally as overexcited, all of them clamoring over the colorful, fading streaks in the sky. The cyan pegasus blinked as she saw one downtrodden pony in an overcoat with a large sign around his neck, 'THE END IS NEIGH'.

"Uh, Rarity, should we..."

"Yes, I believe it would be best for us to leave."

"Agreed."

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"Shoot girl, ain't you just a regular ol' Casanovah!" Applejack slapped Trixie's withers in a forceful, friendly manner. "That's a perfect idea!" The unicorn mare almost fell forward at the impact that rocked her entire skeleton and internal organs.

"That **is** such an awesome super booktastic idea! I never would've thought to take Twilight out on a date to a library before but then again I've never thought about taking out Twilight Sparkle on a date before even though she's like super-smart and super-pretty and stuff but then again Mom and Dad are probably still mad from the last time I brought a filly home but I mean it's so obvious—Twilight loves books so much that she might as well live in a library! Wouldn't that be incredible for her? Ooh, ooh! You should totally buy her a library, Trixie!"

"But Pinkie Pie, Twilight does live in—"

"But then again Dashie's always saying that if Twilight likes books so much she should marry one, but if she marries a book then she won't be able to be with you Trixie! You should be careful at the library 'cause you never know when

one of those sexy, wily books might sweep Twilight off her feet and steal her from you right under your nose! Ooh, but maybe you and Twilight and Mr. Book could try for an open relationship! Mom and Dad were super extra mad that time I brought home two—" Pinkie Pie was swiftly silenced from the rest of the ponies by a large, pink bubble that magically encased her.

The Great and Powerful Trixie's horn stopped glowing. "Could we not talk about this as if Twilight is not right down the hall showering this very minute?!" The unicorn mare looked... twitchy there in the kitchen of the apartment, surrounded by the rest of the ponies and the dragon she couldn't remember the name of.

"Now c'mon, Ah know yer nervous about your date with Twilight, but Pinkie Pie just wants to help—y'all said you wanted our assistance, remember?" Applejack poked the giant bubble, watching as it floated slowly away from her.

Trixie blushed slightly. "This is not a date!" she hissed, turning her head to look back at the hallway, relaxing somewhat as she heard the shower still running... and singing?

Spike crossed his arms as he leaned back on the cabinet door behind him. "Wish Rarity was here... Then I could go on a date too..." The young scribe was still peeved at the offensive drawings he had woken up to, and the scrubbing that followed. 'At least they didn't use a belt sander like Pinkie suggested.'

Fluttershy giggled as she bumped the bubble with her head, sending it drifting softly upwards. "Oh but Trixie, it would be such a shame to waste this opportunity to get to um, know Twilight better..."

"See? Fluttershy's got the right idea! Just find the most boringnest, secludest part of the library and work yer magic on her, if-ya-know-what-Ah-mean!" The farmer bumped the bubble as it neared her, sending it floating towards Trixie. "Ah betcha ain't nopony gonna stumble in on you two rasslin' in the back of the dumb ol' chemistry section!"

Fluttershy lowered her head, hiding her blush with her long mane. "But... that's not what I meant at all..."

Trixie looked positively galled—this was the second time these ponies suggested she do untoward things to Twilight Sparkle! "Speaking such aspersions upon Trixie's good name! What kind of perverse pony do you take her for?"

Applejack smirked at the unicorn. “Now come on, y'all can level with me— Ah think we both know what yer really after, and it ain't Twilight's booksmarts!”

The showmare bumped the bubble away with her muzzle before glaring at the farmer, stepping forward. “Trixie would **never** use her magic to take advantage of anypony, especially her!”

Applejack stepped forward as well, glaring right back at the showmare, looking evenly into her eyes. Towards the back of the kitchen, Fluttershy and Spike looked at each other worriedly, until they heard the blond-maned mare loose a chuckle. “Ain't no way to hide lyin' eyes, Sugarcube.”

Trixie blinked in confusion at the good-natured grin on the orange pony's face. “And yer eyes are tellin' the truth; Ah can tell y'all are gonna treat 'er right.” Stepping back and taking a seat at the kitchen table, the draft pony winked at the showmare. “Ah just needed to make real shore one last time before Ah sent'cha on a date with our little Twilight.”

Fluttershy bobbed her head, trying to shift her long mane from covering her vision. “Um, but Applejack, aren't you younger than—”

“Now Sugarcube, don't go an' involve yer fancy-pants math in on this.”

All the ponies were startled by a loud explosion as Spike accidentally popped the giant bubble when he poked it with his claw. His surprised yelp was cut short as Pinkie Pie dropped from the bubble and landed on him. “—and that's when Mom and Dad kicked me out of the farm and then I needed a new place to live so I built Ponyville and invited all my friends to party every day!”

Silence filled the room for a second or two until an alarmed Twilight Sparkle came out running from the bathroom, toothbrush in her mouth and towel wrapped around her head, dripping water everywhere. “Whah whuf daht?!” In her haste, the lavender unicorn slipped and slid across the floor, slamming into the back of one of the living room's sofas. Everyone in the room winced; Trixie felt a hoof on her shoulder—it was Applejack, sullenly shaking her head giving the showmare a pitying look that very clearly relayed: ‘Yep, that's who you fell for.’

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Twilight Sparkle wondered how many more times she was going to embarrass herself in front of The Great and Powerful Trixie—her only saving grace was that Rainbow Dash was not around to provide her thoughts on the lavender unicorn's less-than-gracious display of coordination and calm.

The bookworm fidgeted with her saddlebag as she stood outside the apartment, waiting for her Test Subject to join her for their research outing—the showmare had told her to wait outside for one moment, claiming she had forgotten something back inside. Twilight tried keeping her mind busy with ways in which she could prove or disprove the prevailing theory shared by her woefully unscientific friends. She furrowed her brow in frustration—despite the months of research stored in her head, nothing she had found in her study of Friendship was yielding anything relevant to the matter at hand.

Twilight had a vague idea of what this suspected affliction—'Being in Love' as the laypony called it—was supposed to feel like, if Rarity's musings on romance were anything to go by. To hear her unicorn friend tell it, it would seem that a pony's body would go through a gamut of strange psychosomatic responses, some even hallucinatory in nature. Twilight flinched as she recalled when she first arrived at the Clydesler Building. 'That would explain why I couldn't see all the newsponies yesterday!'

The thought that The Great and Powerful Trixie's mere presence could trigger such a response in her brain left Twilight Sparkle somewhat perturbed—not only at the implication that her less-studious friends somehow managed to produce a baseless but correct hypothesis, but also at the fact that this 'Love' thing apparently caused selective blindness! “Ridiculous.”

“What did you call Trixie?”

“GAH!” Twilight reeled away from the azure mare, sparkling in and out of teleportation a few times before materializing close to the hallway's ceiling and falling on her haunches a few feet away. “Ohmygosh T-Trixie! Don't sneak up on me like that!” the streak-maned pony could feel her heart about to burst from the scare she got. 'I didn't even **notice** when she came out of the apartment! Oh Celestia, she's making me blind **and** deaf!'

The Great and Powerful Trixie raised an eyebrow at the adorable display; she briefly wondered what had distracted the lavender pony so thoroughly. “Trixie has been standing next to you for a while now.”

Twilight got back to her feet, using her magic to dust herself off, intent on completely ignoring her magical panic attack. “W-well, since we're here, you know, both of us... I guess we should head to the library now?” she smiled sheepishly, ears turned back and one hoof slightly raised from the floor.

Trixie blinked and blushed slightly—it's just a library visit, right? Not a date. “Uh, yes. There are two of us, and we're going to the library.” she replied stiffly, mirroring Twilight's nervous stance.

Both ponies remained in silence for a moment, each avoiding the other's gaze as awkwardness permeated them thoroughly. They were both waiting for the other to take some sort of action, but as each second passed, each mare grew more reticent and fearful of breaking the uncomfortable air around them with even more awkwardness.

“Oh fer cryin' out loud!” Both mares were startled out of their thoughts by Applejack's muffled voice coming from the other side of the apartment door. Throwing the door open, the blond-maned pony stamped her hooves repeatedly on the floor as she bucked wildly. “Git a move on you two! C'mon, c'mon! ELEVATOR NOW!” she shouted, before producing a length of rope and whipping Trixie's flank with it.

The showmare reared up reflexively at the stinging hit, loosing a loud neigh that frightened Twilight into rearing up and neighing as well. Both unicorns quickly took off, galloping at full tilt with Applejack right behind them whooping and hollering. “Git along, little ponies! YEE-HAW!”

Down the hall, Pinkie Pie waited for the trio with a large DETOUR sign in hoof pointing at the elevator she had already called. Applejack easily corralled the unicorns into the elevator as Pinkie Pie stretched her foreleg inside and pressed the button for the main lobby. As the door closed behind them, the still-frantic unicorns quickly calmed down when they realized what had happened. They looked at each other with wide eyes as their heaving breaths normalized—a silent agreement suddenly sparked between them: there is no need to speak of what just happened. Ever.

With that settled, each mare quickly used her magic to straighten up her disheveled mane and coat. In doing so, Twilight was reminded of the saddlebag she had brought, and specifically, what she had packed in it the day before. Glancing at Trixie out of the corner of her eye, the unicorn grew nervous once more. 'Should I? What would she think of me?' The bookworm turned and faced the deep blue unicorn. “Um Trixie...?”

'Does this uncouth pony not know common elevator courtesy?' The Great and Powerful Trixie rolled her eyes. "Yes?"

How to begin? "Trixie, do you remember Rarity?" Twilight shifted her weight anxiously. At Trixie's confused stare, the lavender unicorn continued. "She's that really pretty unicorn you uh... Well, you turned her mane into a rotting green nest?"

The Great and Powerful Trixie winced—she didn't need to be reminded of how she had begun to misuse her magic, even after the vow she had made as a young filly. "Trixie recalls the... event."

"Well, see..." The librarian was quite visibly nervous, something that made Trixie somewhat nervous too. "After you left Ponyville I... Okay, you see, the point is I went to her to..." Twilight's horn began glowing, as the cutie mark buckle on her saddlebag became magically undone. "...I went to her because she's so good at... I mean, she didn't want to at first, but—"

With a loud chime, the elevator came to a lurching stop on the 42nd floor, a crowd of business ponies quickly piling in and pushing Twilight and Trixie to the back corner of the space. Twilight quickly buckled closed her saddlebag. "Um, you know what? I'm just rambling, forget I said anything." she whispered as she smiled apprehensively at the showmare. 'What were you thinking, Twilight? You were going to give yourself away and ruin the whole experiment!'

The Great and Powerful Trixie's mind was currently reeling—her brain was coming up with an endless number of possible words that could fill in the blanks in Twilight's nervous rant, and every word that Trixie added just made the finished paragraph all that much worse. Just what **is** that Rarity character so good at, anyways? She couldn't possibly be better than The Great and Powerful Trixie! And yet, Twilight was apparently drawn to that white, haughty trollop of a pony who had the absolute **gall** to refuse the poor lavender unicorn's attention?

'Who the moon does that Rarity think she is? Trixie will show that talentless, bad dye-job who the better unicorn is! Trixie will give Twilight everything she wants!'

Twilight Sparkle didn't know what to make of the determined, slightly evil grin smeared across The Great and Powerful Trixie's face.

Chapter 13

The Volume of Love

"I thought Trixie said not to follow her." the young dragon crossed his arms as he watched his three friends getting ready to leave the apartment. Spike sat on the countertop, exasperation in his eyes as Applejack finished stuffing the picnic basket Pinkie Pie had 'found', while said party pony placed the finishing touches on Fluttershy to conceal her from her adoring public.

Applejack chuckled as she struggled to close the basket, pressing on it with both forelegs. "Shucks Sugarcube, we ain't intendin' to follow Trixie at all!" she winked, finally managing to lock the overcapacity food carrier.

Pinkie Pie happily collected the yellow pegasus's flowing locks under a blue-patterned bandanna, placing a flat-billed cap on top of it after tying it off. "We won't be able to follow Trixie 'cause we're gonna be super busy following Twilight!" she explained, stepping back and admiring her handiwork; aside from a cap, a bandanna, and a pair of large shades, Fluttershy wore an oversized white shirt with 'STUD LYFE' emblazoned on it in gratuitously fancy print. "Perfect!" Pinkie Pie adjusted the cap, turning it to one side and placing it precariously high on the gentle pony's head. "Doesn't she look great, guys?"

Fluttershy demurely turned her head towards her friends, tingeing slightly. Applejack and Spike exchanged a queasy look. "She shore looks... *something*, Pinkie." Placing the picnic basket on her back, Applejack trotted to the door. "Just... just don't let Rarity see ya in that getup, Hun."

The pegasus nodded nervously—Rarity would have a fit to end all fits, that was for certain. Following Applejack out the door, Fluttershy turned to look back at the baby dragon. "Um, Spike... Would you like to come with us?"

The purple reptilian stuck out his tongue. "Ewww, and watch Twi go on a girly, lovey-dovey date? Super gross! Besides," Spike ran his hands across his head spines, "What if Rarity comes over and finds the apartment empty? A gentleman should never leave a lady stranded like that." he declared, thrusting out his chest and nonchalantly checking his claws.

'He's worse than Apple Bloom!' Applejack gave him an amused look. "Heh, whatever you say, Sugarcube... Ya'll behave now!" she said, holding the door

open as Pinkie Pie walked out of the apartment as well. The farmer turned to leave, but just before closing the door, she stuck her head back inside and smirked at the dragon. “Oh, and if Rainbow Dash comes back 'fore we do, you tell her Ah love 'er more than apple loves pie, ya hear?”

Spike cringed immaturally at the draft pony. “Ew, Applejack! Not you too!”

“And be shore to give 'er a whole buncha kisses for me, like this!” the orange pony puckered her lips and began exaggeratedly blowing kisses at the scribe as the ponies in the hallway began snickering.

Spike quickly brought his hands to the sides of his head and shut his eyes, “Aaaahhh I'm not listening! Not listening! LA-LA-LA-LAAA!!”

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The morning rush hour had subsided by the time the two unicorn mares took to the streets; of course, the change was imperceptible, as there were still a multitude of ponies going about their daily lives—even at its sleepest, Manehattan was bustling city always on the move. Though already late Spring, the temperature was comfortably cool at this hour thanks to the shade provided by the tall skyline of the city.

The Great and Powerful Trixie had a lot going on in her mind as she trotted down the sidewalk alongside Twilight Sparkle, the pony that currently occupied most, if not all of her thoughts. Thankfully, the lavender unicorn had remained quiet since they left the Clydesler Building—just like Trixie, Twilight seemed to be deep in thought. The showmare had to admit that her companion's pensive face was utterly endearing—then again, she was beginning to think that of pretty much any expression the blue-maned pony made.

Yup, there was a definite *pattern* to her thoughts on Twilight Sparkle, Trixie noticed.

This predicament caused the azure mare great annoyance—not at having fallen for the awkward pony in the first place, but at having fallen for her so *swiftly*. She hadn't noticed it at first; in fact, she hadn't noticed it until days after her magic decided to stop working on the very same night she left Ponyville—what a *spectacularly unpleasant* experience those magic-less days were! It was

quite frankly a miracle she had survived as long as she did in that unnatural forest. *'If it weren't for that zebra...'*

Trixie could still remember the striped equine's haughty laugh when she examined the non-magical magician—the showmare realized that one of these days, she would need to go back and apologize to the wise mare; her words were completely and utterly true, but of course, Trixie had not been in any mood to listen back then.

—What a silly mare, why must you act so dramatic? Can you not see your affliction is purely psychosomatic?—

The Great and Powerful Trixie rolled her eyes, *'A simple “You're in denial!” would have sufficed, zebra!’* she mused, wondering how many days of suffering that would have saved her. Of course, things didn't exactly get much better for her mental health once her magic *did* return...

...In the form of Twilight Sparkle illusions, and **only** of her.

The showmare could have done without the psychological trauma of spending a few days as a glorified Twilight Sparkle *photo album*. It was probably the first time she had cursed her exceptional memory, especially considering she hadn't even tried to burn any detail about the lavender mare into her mind in the first place. Technically, this was still the case; Trixie still didn't know much about the object of her unwitting affection, except from what little she had observed or gathered from the unicorn's friends.

One thing she *did* know was that somehow, Twilight Sparkle had appeared at some of the towns the deep blue unicorn was about to perform at, probably following the main trails that connected the larger villages. After that realization, Trixie had started taking the back roads and skipping over towns neighboring those she had just performed in. Of course, she had apparently been somewhat hasty in assuming that the lavender mare had stopped looking for her just because Trixie had succeeded in throwing her off her trail.

'And she kept looking for Trixie all this time, just because she wanted to be Trixie's friend? What an idiot! What a stubborn mule!' The thought should have exasperated the showmare, but instead she found herself grinning stupidly and uncontrollably. In fact, she actually had to suppress a giggle; *a giggle!* That's where she had to draw the line though—Trixie chortles, chuckles, and laughs jovially (or derisively, some would claim), but she does **not** giggle like some 15-year-old with a crush!

Trixie blinked. She *had* giggled the day before, hadn't she? Confound this streak-maned pony!

'Well, no more! Trixie is above such schoolfilly anti—' A very loud **CLANG** startled Trixie out of her introspection; Twilight Sparkle had apparently slammed right into a large post box, running her horn clean through its side and probably into some of the mail within. The lavender unicorn looked utterly bewildered at her predicament; whatever it was that was occupying her mind must have been incredibly distracting—Trixie could do nothing more than to burst into snorting giggles at the sight.

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Twilight Sparkle had a lot on her mind as she trotted down the sidewalk alongside The Great and Powerful Trixie, the pony who some speculate she may or may not be infatuated with. Thankfully, the azure unicorn had remained silent since they left the Clydesler Building—just like Twilight, Trixie seemed to have something weighing on her mind. This suited the bookworm just fine as it gave her more time to analyze the situation she now found herself in; specifically, she had been trying to work out a way to accurately measure love *empirically*.

The way she figured it, she had a wealth of raw data on love already: what she felt for her parents, for Spike, for her friends, for Princess Celestia, and for her books. Although she could certainly *feel* how each of those was different, feelings were hardly scientific or appropriate for inclusion in a serious dissertation. What Twilight Sparkle needed was a way to precisely quantify the volume of love she was outputting at any given moment. *'That is, if love actually occupies a three-dimensional space... What if love radiates in a circle of straight lines at very high frequencies? I'll need some sort of love measuring tool... A Love Caliper?... Wait, is love a wave or a particle?'*

Clearly, actually converting love into a useable number was going to be the hard part; once that phase of the investigation was completed, all Twilight really needed to do was compare her love of Trixie to a random sampling of her love for her friends and family. *'Love of Trixie...'* The studious unicorn could feel herself grinning like an idiot—this could be a problem, she realized; Trixie seemed to possess some form of passive magic that could interfere with Twilight's motor skills, thought process, and nervous system just by proximity!

Sure, the interference made the librarian pony feel really, really good about being around the other mare, but that could invalidate the entire experiment! How could she investigate her feelings for Trixie if her feelings for Trixie kept getting in the way?

The Manehattan library was sure to have quite a lot of scientific literature on the topic of love—Twilight knew for a fact that Rarity owned a large amount of books on that very same subject; in fact, the white unicorn would probably make for a very useful case study and assistant in this investigation. The stylish mare was *sure* to have compiled an abundance of information on love already; plus, as the most vocal opponent to Twilight's search for the once-missing magician, Rarity would provide much needed counter-arguments against any pro-love bias that Applejack may have subconsciously planted on Twilight.

Taking a subtle glance to her right, Twilight was surprised to find that her Test Subject was actually grinning quite happily for some reason. Something had obviously put the showmare in a great mood; it was the most uncanny thing—Twilight hadn't seen such pure mirth on Trixie's face before; whenever the blue pony smiled, her eyes always held an edge of defiance, a confrontational glint that reflected her belief in every other pony's amusing inferiority.

Trixie looked almost like an entirely different pony, smiling like that. Twilight definitely liked that look but in the back of her head, a small voice echoed its complaints across her mind, and quite loudly. Twilight reddened—did part of her actually *prefer* the azure unicorn's brazen, boastful attitude? It was painfully obvious now that Trixie's magical influence on the lavender unicorn went much deeper than initially thought—sudden, shooting pain snaked its way across Twilight's face as her world became a mass of blue with blots of throbbing lights whirling around the periphery of her field of vision. As the pain subsided, she became aware of a dull ringing in her ears, and an unsettling sensation of being held in place by some unknown force that seemed to be clutching her horn.

'What's going on?!' Twilight Sparkle's mind went into panic mode as she began fidgeting against the metal abomination that had taken hold of her so violently. What a frighteningly tenacious grip! The lavender unicorn gritted her teeth as she funneled and gathered as much magic as she could into her horn—*When time is of the essence, a massive application of force will always yield results*—those had been Princess Celestia's wise words.

Twilight blinked in surprise as the sound of musical giggling and assonant snorting filled her ears. A quick look to her right revealed the source: The Great and Powerful Trixie sat on the sidewalk, forelegs covering her face as she tried to no avail to stifle her laughter. “H-hey!”

Trixie quickly clammed up and stood up straight, eyes shut tight and biting her lip as she shuddered with restrained laughter that escaped her body through her nose, judging by the loud sniffing she was unable to hide. Opening one teary eye, she peeked at the little siege pony still stuck in the innocent metal box. “Perhaps it would be easier to go *around* the mailbox?” she grinned brightly.

Twilight turned beet-red as it dawned on her exactly what had happened. Dispelling her magic buildup lest she be arrested for destroying government property, the bookish mare instead used telekinesis to free herself from the post box before hanging her head in shame—shame that only escalated as she realized that a few ponies around the sidewalk and in a couple of carriages on the street were also openly laughing at her. *‘Well, this day is turning out to be just as great as yesterday...’*

“W-what the moon—”

“Oh sweet Celestia why?!”

Twilight was startled into raising her head as soon as she heard the crackling thunderclap that silenced all the laughter—she was met with the sight of one of the carriage drivers and her passengers fleeing from the vehicle, and specifically, fleeing from the storm cloud that just happened to materialize within its cabin. The incredulous mare quickly turned around to see The Great and Powerful Trixie's horn flickering off, a stern expression on her face as she glared at anypony within line of sight. The unicorn mares were quickly left alone on the sidewalk as every pony on their side crossed the street so as not to go near The Great and Powerful Trixie.

Raising an eyebrow at the strange look Twilight was giving her, the magician could only blush. “*What?*” she asked, a bit more tersely than she'd intended.

Twilight flinched slightly, but still had her eyes locked on the showmare's own. “Why did—”

The azure mare stared straight back at her companion, but remembering Applejack's earlier words caused Trixie to tear her eyes away from Twilight's questioning gaze. "Laughing at Trixie's acquaintance is the same thing as laughing at Trixie herself!" she huffed, facing away from the lavender pony.

Twilight raised an eyebrow and shook her head as the fallacy physically struck her. "Wha... Trixie, you were laughing at me too!" she complained, getting up from her haunches and stepping close to the showmare, craning her neck as she tried to meet Trixie's eyes again.

Trixie, for her part, avoided Twilight by turning her body away from the streak-maned pony. "Trixie was *not*," she lied, taking a step back and away from the librarian.

Twilight quickly circled the other unicorn, still trying to face her. "Trixie!" she called, as the showmare quickly spun away from her again. The lavender pony just barely managed to catch the taunting smirk on the magician's face before she turned away. "Trixie, stop that!" Twilight couldn't keep the laughter out of her voice as she began running around the showmare who kept turning around to avoid her stare. Twilight Sparkle had the distinct feeling that they both looked like idiots, spinning around as they were.

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"They look like idiots." Rafale deadpanned, peeking at the pair of unicorns from behind a newspaper as she sat on a bus stop bench across the street from them.

"Well Ah dunno," chuckled the farmer seated next to the white pegasus, also hidden by a newspaper, "Ah mean yeah, they do, but it's kinda cute—ain't that right, Pinkie Pie?" she asked as she leaned on the large and very conspicuous bale of hay next to her; said bale seemed to be wearing fake glasses and mustache.

Next to the bale and in plain sight sat Pinkie Pie, looking as merry as ever. "Is it *ever*! I already sent my designs to the print shop! We should do a double ultra 'You Finally Hooked Up' party for them and for you and Dashie when we go back home!"

"That would be lovely, actually... That is, if you don't mind, um, Applejack..." said the bale of hay demurely.

Applejack tinged slightly. "Ya'll don't have to make such a big fuss on account of us, fellas."

The party pony quickly peeked around the bale to smile at the other earth pony. "Oh it's not any trouble at all, Jackie! Besides, I already sent the invitations!"

"Jackie?"

"Dashie and Jackie! Besides, *everypony* in town's been waiting on you guys since like, **forever!**" she flailed, rolling her eyes.

Applejack half-smirked. "That obvious, huh?" She asked, already knowing the answer; it's pretty difficult to hide anything when you're *Honesty incarnate*.

"We um, we had a betting pool." replied the bale, shifting slightly. Before Applejack could respond to that, a sharp cracking sound startled both the bale and the farmer.

Rafale sighed as she turned a page on her newspaper. "...Aaaaand she used one of her smokebombs. *I hate those things.*"

The three Ponyville denizens turned their gaze across the street, where they spotted Trixie running away from a slightly blackened and completely surprised Twilight, a dissipating plume of smoke before her. "Come back here, you witch!" she shouted in false anger, giving chase after the cackling blue pony.

"Ok, so that's one new carriage, five Non-Disclosure Agreements, and whatever the fine is for defacing government property," listed Rafale, seemingly talking to herself.

Applejack folded her newspaper and placed it on top of the bale of hay. "Say what?" she asked, turning to face the uniformed pegasus. Behind Rafale, another pegasus mare nodded and flew off with a checkbook in mouth. "Who was *that?*"

“That was Mirage, one of my coworkers. She's gonna take care of...” Rafale waved her hoof in the general direction of where the unicorn spectacle had occurred, “...this mess while I keep an eye on Trixie.”

“Oh.” Applejack got up from the bench. “Ah was wonderin' why you were followin' us followin' Twilight.”

Rafale got up from the bench as well and fixed a bemused stare at Applejack. “What...? But you guys're the ones following *me*! I'm her private security, I'm *supposed* to be following Trixie!”

The bale of hay sprouted yellow wings and gently left the bench as well, hovering next to the orange earth pony. “Oh that's so nice of you to worry over Trixie like that, um... uh....”

The white pegasus bristled slightly at the accusation. “Rafale Mistral, and it's kind of my job to...” her words died down as she stared at the winged bundle. “...why are you wearing *hay*?”

Pinkie Pie hopped excitedly from the bench and over to Rafale's side, throwing a friendly hoof over her withers. “Isn't it pure genius? See, I thought, ‘*Duh*, everypony's *already* seen me in this disguise, so if I *don't* wear it now, they'll never recognize me since they're totally gonna be expecting me to be disguised like that and then I won't be!”

“Uh... *What?*”

Applejack grinned at the confused security pony. “Can't argue with that logic!”

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The Giggling and Powerful Trixie galloped down the sidewalk at full tilt, deftly avoiding all the not-having-fun ponies walking in her way. She had no idea what had gotten into her—a small voice in the back of her head was actually scolding her for acting like an immature little foal, but for some reason, the showmare just couldn't bring herself to care, especially when Twilight Sparkle was acting every bit as foalish as her!

“Gotcha!” shouted the lavender pony as she materialized right in front of the speeding Trixie. A couple of things occurred to Twilight Sparkle as the surprisingly sturdy magician mowed her down: first, does Trixie work out? She hits like a tank; second, perhaps she should have given the showmare a bit more distance to stop. A bit more than *none*.

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“Besides, I believed you would be somewhat,” Miss Spelling reddened a bit as she sipped on her chocolate milkshake, “...well, *pleased* with my eventual dismissal from the studio, seeing as our—you're not even listening to me, are you?” she asked, noticing that the smirking pegasus had her attention focused on something happening over the orange pony's shoulder.

“You just missed like the greatest thing ever, and you are not going to get yourself fired because that's stupid.” Holly Diver took one of the pieces of dark chocolate from Miss Spelling's plate.

The unicorn adjusted her glasses. “And what, exactly, did I miss? You know very well that the studio's been trying to get rid of me from day one.”

Holly Diver reached for another piece of chocolate, but the unicorn batted her hoof away. “So what, you're just gonna let them win? That's not like you at all, Missy. Oh, and you just missed Twilight Sparkle getting absolutely *destroyed* by Ms. Trixie.” she smiled, reaching for Miss Spelling's plate again. A pulsating, octagonal barrier materialized in front of the chocolate. “I bought those for you!”

“Yes, you did. You bought them for *me*, which is why I couldn't possibly let *you* eat them.” she explained, taking another piece for herself. “Unlike you, I take no pleasure in antagonizing my superiors. And I hope you are not being too literal with the word 'destroyed'.”

Holly Diver shrugged. “I think I've got a pretty good handle on what you take pleasure from by now—oh, here she comes, here she comes!” flailed the pegasus eagerly, pointing towards the entrance to Spurbucks.

“Right, because I am going to turn around so you can steal all of my chocolate.”

A pleasant chime from the bell placed on top of the doorframe heralded The Great and Powerful Trixie's arrival to everypony present. "You! Servant!" she declared, quickly stepping up to the counter and cutting in line. "Trixie demands a paper towel and a cup of ice!"

The pale brown colt behind the counter eyed the azure mare with the weary, dead eyes of an Equestrian Classical Studies graduate turned barista. "Gjere, Goljam, Bolsoj, or Llarg?"

Trixie eyed the the barista incredulously, momentarily confused. "T-Trixie does not speak Proletarian! Where is your manager?!"

"Those are the sizes of our artisanal beverages, Miss." explained the colt tiredly, waving his hoof over four near-identical display cups to his left.

The showmare stared dumbly between the cups and the colt with the meticulously unkempt-looking mane—it must have taken him hours to it get to look like that. "Just... Just give Trixie the first one..."

"One Gjere Minnetrotka Chilled Ice, that'll be fifteen bits. Would you care to join our Mochaholics Rewards Prog—"

"Are you charging Trixie for **ice**?!" The scandalized pony was quickly finding everything about this colt highly offensive—especially the ascot he was wearing along with his uniform.

The colt gave a short, exasperated sigh as he theatrically rolled his eyes. "Miss, all of Spurbucks's chilled beverages, including Chilled Ice Cubes, are mixed exclusively with ice made from the pure waters of—"

"Oi! Perfect Mane Forever!" Both the barista and the magician (and a number of the more stylish patrons) turned to the source of the voice: a gray pegasus mare in one of the booths towards the back of the shop. "We got her tab, just give the lady what she wants, my good colt!"

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Twilight held the improvised bag of ice over her left eye with magic as she trotted alongside Trixie down the street—she figured that being trampled had

not been an entirely bad experience; Trixie had brought her a big slice of chocolate cake as an apology, even though the haughty unicorn had come up with a very flimsy lie about how they were giving out free samples and her not being hungry.

Twilight was feeling quite a bit chipper, despite the bruised ribs—she had begun to suspect that Trixie had chased away the laughing ponies earlier because she didn't want them laughing at the slightly absentminded mare. The thought that Trixie might actually care just a little bit was making her feel as light as a pegasus.

“...How do you do it?”

“Huh?” the librarian stopped her trot, eyeing the magician curiously.

Trixie stopped as well. “Show Trixie how you teleport.”

“Huh?”

The showmare blushed; she hated asking for help. “It can't *possibly* be that hard to learn if the pink earth pony can do it.”

“Huuuuh?!”

Chapter 14

Panic at the Bibliothèque

It was a fairly innocent request; at least, that's what The Great and Powerful Trixie had thought over half an hour ago when she had first made it: Twilight knew a spell that allowed her to teleport, and Trixie wanted to learn it. Rather straightforward, all things considered. Of course, the magician had apparently committed a mortal sin against the Sun by so carelessly implying that Pinkie Pie could teleport as Twilight Sparkle was wont to do. To say Twilight took issue with that implication was a colossal understatement. The lavender mare seemed to be emotionally and physically offended by Trixie's statement, going so far as to insinuate that the showmare had verbally transgressed against the *entirety of unicorn life*—past, present **and** future.

Now, Pinkie's shenanigans were certainly *trying* on the azure unicorn's belief in the laws of nature and causality, but her complaints were relatively minor—by orders of magnitude, in fact—compared to Twilight's ire. Instead of demonstrating the spell, the streak-maned pony had veered straight into the mother of all tirades, much to Trixie's initial chagrin. The showmare had attempted to distract Twilight with a meandering tour of downtown Manehattan and its famous locales, but the lavender pony was locked in frustration-venting mode and her eloquent indignation would not be easily derailed... That is, until her growling stomach made its own, separate indignation apparent.

Raising an eyebrow at the sheepish bookworm but feeling quite hungry herself, Trixie pointed a hoof towards an oat-dog vendor on a nearby street corner; the line was somewhat long, but seemed to be moving quickly. Feeling uncommonly benign, Trixie chose not to mention the slice of chocolate cake Twilight had already consumed from Spurbucks, or the fact that they were hungry because the studious mare had detonated their original breakfast earlier that day in a dazzling display of petulance.

The magician had to marvel at the immediate reversal in Twilight's mood as soon as she bit into that first oat-dog—clearly, there was some real merit to the suggestion of keeping her fed throughout the day. Trixie hadn't even finished paying when she spotted the other unicorn making the line again, happily licking her lips; she hadn't figured Twilight for the kind of pony to enjoy greasy street-food—somehow, she couldn't quite picture carnival food being served in the majestic halls of Canterlot Castle.

Nonetheless, Trixie found herself happy to be able to indulge without feeling self-conscious; she had developed a rather *healthy* appetite from her years of exhaustive traveling and constant use of magic, yet Twilight matched her dog for dog like an Ursa Minor preparing for hibernation.

After having had their fill and turning down the oat-dog vendor's offer of sponsorship in the next Poney Island Eating Contest, the sated unicorn pair continued their trot down the busy sidewalk in content silence. That is, until Twilight shifted her gaze upward, muzzle scrunching up slightly as she searched for a seemingly stray thought. "What were we talking about, again?"

It was only after the words had left her mouth that The Great and Powerful Trixie realized her terrible mistake—disarmed by her post-breakfast bliss, the magician had given Twilight an honest answer, reminding her exactly where to start off her rant once more. Rolling her eyes, Trixie led the other unicorn down a few more streets as she listened to a seemingly endless list of reasons why Pinkie Pie's magic was *not* magic. Their walk ended at the bottom of an alabaster staircase at least half a city block wide and an inordinate number of steps high; after climbing halfway up said steps, Trixie sat down and watched Twilight do the same, all the while still deeply committed to her magical lecture.

They rested there for at least another half hour, and The Great and Powerful Trixie smirked to herself as she watched the vexed pony; very soon after Twilight had restarted her rant, the magician had begun to playfully interrupt it every few minutes with illogical counter-points. Twilight, apparently *extremely* easy to bait, seemed completely oblivious to Trixie's teasing tone—the librarian took each and every fallacious argument in total seriousness, much to her own mounting exasperation.

Now, in the back of her mind, Trixie knew that fueling Twilight Sparkle's aggravation was *perhaps* counterproductive to a hypothetical future reciprocation of her as-of-now unrequited love. Why do it, then? Aside from getting back at the other unicorn for talking her ears off (*especially* the constant Celestia name-dropping), the expressions and spirited gesticulation Twilight displayed during her infinite nerd rage were undeniably adorable and utterly amusing—this was truly a pony that wore her heart on her saddle! Trixie could certainly see what drove school-age ponies to mercilessly pick on their crushes: it was very, very entertaining.

The magician couldn't hold back the chuckle that escaped her throat as she recalled the picture of filly Twilight that she had seen during her stay at the Canterlot—

“What's so funny?”

Busted. *'Took her a while.'* The Great and Powerful Trixie trained her aloof, half-smirking face at the mare sitting two steps down, but said half-smirk quickly fell away as she met Twilight's gaze; the look being cast her way brought pause to her comeback. “Er...” she replied smartly, not entirely sure what to make of the utter disappointment in those purple eyes glaring back at her.

Twilight turned away from the azure mare, her face still glowering but not focusing on anything in particular. “Of *course* you weren't really listening.” she spat disdainfully before catching herself and blinking; she appeared genuinely surprised at her own words. “Ah,” she began, turning her attention back to Trixie and looking honestly apologetic, “I didn't mean that, I just...” Her eyes nervously flickered left and right as she searched for a way to excuse her caustic tone of voice.

Trixie raised an eyebrow as the chip on Twilight's shoulder made itself blatantly conspicuous—enlightenment sparked across the showmare's mind as her thoughts flashed back to the previous day, and specifically, to Pinkie Pie's antics. Ridiculously impossible? Absolutely. Did Fluttershy mind? She was all smiles. Did Applejack mind? Too trifling for her to fuss about. Did The Pegasus mind? She at least had the common decency to look somewhat weary, but that went out the window as soon as Pinkie offered her something sweet to eat or drink.

“Heh.” Trixie smirked at Twilight Sparkle, whose gaze snapped back to the entertainer's own violet eyes. The fact that all of her new friends barely acknowledged Pinkie Pie's utter disregard for the laws and limitations of time and space was quite a bit more jarring to Trixie than the very acts themselves—and Twilight, ever the fastidious scholar, was probably much worse off. Trixie turned her face with a condescending huff, peering at Twilight out of the corner of her vision.

“It seems all you ever do is make erroneous accusations against Trixie's character, Twilight Sparkle.” She smiled as Twilight's shamefaced countenance quickly contorted into indignation and anger. *'No pony around you is interested in finding out how she does what she does.'* Trixie loosed another chuckle. “You must enjoy being proven wrong.” she added in a patronizing tone as she stood

up, keeping her gaze trained on the lavender pony. Trixie recalled one of The Pegasus's nicknames for the bookworm: *The One Nerd to Bore Them All*.

Twilight was deeply cared for by her friends, that much was evident, but she was still the nerd in the group—forget the Pinkie Pie matter: it was very likely that Twilight didn't have anypony she could geek out to about *any* subject matter. *'That's what she gets for moving to such a backwoods little town!'* The blue unicorn very loudly shushed Twilight as soon as she opened her muzzle to voice her thoughts on the magician's attitude; Trixie smiled wide as the other mare's bruised eye twitched with barely contained fury.

Very, very entertaining *indeed!*

“Ah-*HEM*.” Trixie made a show of clearing her throat as she looked pointedly at Twilight; she loved this part of the act, the moment right before show time—when she could feel the apprehension in the crowd; their disinterest, their disdain. A street performer? Probably some glorified panhandler plucking coins from behind the ears of ponies with real jobs.

Look at you, a unicorn doing magic; so very novel. How could you possibly impress us?

“Pinkie Pie, or *Pinkieus Piecus*, is a female Equestrian Thoroughbred Earth Pony, six hands tall, twenty-two Summers old and the Element of Laughter,” recited Trixie, *'Whatever **that** means.'*

Twilight Sparkle's jaw hit the floor as an uncanny imitation of her own voice flowed smoothly out of The Great and Powerful Trixie's mouth, her rant being quoted word for word. It would have been perfect if not for the slightly condescending inflection imparted upon it; apparently, Trixie couldn't turn that off voluntarily.

Trixie paced up and down the steps, walking in slow circles around Twilight. “As *everypony* knows, the magical domain of Earth Ponies is the manipulation, manufacture, and repurposing of the land and its gifts. Their magic, thought to be the most ancient of the Pony Arts after the magic of our very own Goddesses of the Sun and Moon, is at the same time the most subtle and most direct expression of Magic known to Ponykind.”

Twilight blushed brightly once she realized that Trixie was expressively imitating her mannerisms as well. *'Do I really... **flail** like that?'*

“To quote Princess Celestia et al,” continued Trixie with a dreamy sigh, “Earth Pony Magic is fueled by the land, the energy drawn through their hooves like the roots of a tree; every single step molds and shapes our world. Pegasus Pony Magic radiates from their wings; every single beat from every single pegasus molds and shapes our atmosphere. Unicorn Pony Magic comes from within; every single unicorn heart molds and shapes our innermost thoughts and wishes—”

The librarian was beside herself, almost literally, in fact. She hadn't seen Trixie cast any sort of memory spell or voice alteration spell, so it must—heywaittaminute! “I don't, don't *swoon* like that!” Twilight interjected, quickly rising to her hooves and blushing further.

The interruption momentarily surprised The Great and Powerful Trixie—she was getting into her groove and would have recited the entire thing since it was still fresh in her mind. Shaking it off, she managed to offer Twilight an incredulous look. “Oh, is that a fact? Perhaps that is just your way of pronouncing The Princess's name then, *all seventeen times you quoted her in the past hour.*” Trixie did not want to think about what that implied of Twilight and her now-apparent *affinity* for beautiful, white-coated unicorns.

“I didn't...!” Twilight blinked. ‘*She counted? Did I really?*’ Twilight's mouth opened and closed wordlessly as she searched for an explanation. “W-well, how could I not? Princess Celestia is an amazing polymath, after all!” she replied as she flailed slightly, not entirely sure why she felt like Trixie was accusing her of some sort of wrongdoing.

Trixie gasped in a way that would make Pinkie Pie proud, looking positively scandalized by Twilight's shockingly frank revelation. “The filth! The utter perversion! Trixie should have known that such a power-hungry charlatan would live in absolute decadence of the flesh!” The magician was utterly mortified at the detailed mental pictures, or rather, by her mind's ability to come up with (and readily approve) them; certainly this was cause for concern, considering she always kept her acts free of ribaldry. “P-please tell Trixie you did not partake in that *cabal of sin*, Twilight Sparkle!”

Twilight took a step back, caught off-guard by Trixie's words. “D-decadence of the...? *What?!*” Well, she was *definitely* getting accused of something, alright. “Trixie, I don't quite understand what you're gettin—*Why are you looking at me like that?*”

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"Huh. Ah never woulda fig'erd Twilight being into that sorta thing... An' jus' when you think you know a pony." the farmer scratched her head, an eyebrow hitched as she observed the unicorn pair from her not-that-much-of-a-hiding-spot at the bottom corner of the expansive steps.

Rafale, Miss Spelling, Holly Diver, the bale of hay, and a crimson Fluttershy all turned to look at Applejack with varying degrees of incredulity. Pinkie Pie, wearing red-cyan glasses, happily munched on some popcorn and appeared completely focused on the scene developing between Twilight and Trixie.

Ignoring Holly Diver's apple-eating smirk, Miss Spelling sighed as she cleaned her glasses with a napkin from Spurbucks. "It means that she dominates numerous subjects," she deadpanned, replacing her glasses.

Applejack whistled, her sensibilities a bit overwhelmed with the added information. "Well shoot, Ah could figure out that much, Sug, but what's goin' on behind closed doors between a Princess an' her subjects ain't no concern of mine; least, that's what Ah reckon."

"No, what I..." a flustered Miss Spelling had to hold on to her reply for a couple of minutes while Holly Diver rolled around on the sidewalk in uncontrollable laughter. Halfway through, Pinkie Pie had joined the dark pegasus on the ground, each mare apparently laughing at the fact that the other was laughing. Miss Spelling could see that Fluttershy seemed conflicted between being embarrassed and holding back her own mirth; Applejack, on the other hoof, seemed utterly confused as to what was so funny. Rafale, meanwhile, just stared back at the bespectacled unicorn with a weary sigh.

As their laughter finally died down, Miss Spelling cleared her throat and gave Holly Diver a quick glare before turning to address the farmer. "You misunderstand. What I meant to say is that she is well-read on various sciences and arts."

"Oh." A beat. "So, she **ain't** horsin' around with a whole buncha—"

"No." Miss Spelling replied curtly. Sensing Holly Diver's grin boring into the back of her skull, the red-maned pony turned around. "Yes, Holly? Do you have something that you want to say?"

Holly Diver could *feel* her paycheck becoming smaller by the minute. “Nothing much... Just that I love it when you talk dirty.” she replied, very literally going for broke.

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The Great and Powerful Trixie was enveloped in a full-body blush as she looked down at Twilight Sparkle, who was on her belly, banging her hoof against a step as she nearly asphyxiated in the throes of a laughter-induced asthma attack.

“It was a simple mistake.” she explained, poking the lavender pony's side. For a second, the bookworm stopped laughing and looked up at the red-tinged performer. With a loud raspberry, she carried on with her guffawing, making Trixie's eye twitch. “It is not in your best interest to mock Trixie, Twilight Sparkle, lest you seek retribution.” Seeing her warning and accompanying glower summarily ignored, Trixie decided to get Twilight where it would hurt the most. “Hmm, it seems all this insolence has made Trixie forget the location of the library...” she commented offhandedly, flicking her hair.

Twilight's chortling swiftly died down. “Hwah? Library?” she asked, tilting her head to one side.

The Great and Powerful Trixie raised her eyebrows at the bemused mare, staring at her with half-lidded eyes. “You are kidding, right? Were you not shamelessly begging Trixie to take time out from her *very* occupied schedule to bring you to a library this morning? Trixie remembers your impertinence quite vividly.”

The streak-maned pony tilted her head to the other side. “What are you talking about? ...Oh! *OH!*” Twilight's eyes widened in realization—she had completely forgotten the reason she was out with the magician in the first place! “Yes! The library! Let's go!” she exclaimed giddily, hopping in place.

“Oh, so *now* are you done openly mocking Trixie? How convenient for you. Trixie is a busy pony, Twilight Sparkle, she doesn't know if there will be time now to walk to the library.” she cautioned, turning up her nose at Twilight.

The bookworm's ears and mane dropped. “Oh, I see...”

Trixie blinked at the abject dejection on Twilight's face—she had intended to draw out the teasing, but of course, all this love nonsense had made Trixie

soft. Damn those bright purple eyes! “Trixie is feeling magnanimous, Twilight Sparkle; she will be the better pony and ignore your transgressions,” she smiled imperiously, “For now, anyways.” raising an eyebrow at the other unicorn.

Twilight Sparkle's face quickly brightened, her eyes sparkling. “So, we'll go?” she asked, voice full of hope; it looked like she was physically restraining herself from hopping with joy.

“No.” Trixie couldn't help but chuckle as Twilight's face fell once more. She would do this all day if she could. “We are already here, you see.”

“What.” Twilight asked flatly, giving the azure mare a look that asked, *Do you really think I'm that gullible?*

The Great and Powerful Trixie merely returned the look, *Yes, you are*, before raising a hoof and pointing to her left.

Against her better judgment, Twilight panned her gaze up the remaining steps and focused on the massive edifice at the top; apparently, she had been sitting in front of the thing for the past half hour. Clearly, Trixie's proximity had once again dimmed Twilight's situational awareness, but the studious mare could hardly bring herself to care at the moment, what with a massive library in front of her. Happily galloping past Trixie and up the rest of the stairs, the bookish mare stared in amazement at the sight before her eyes, her smile widening as she took in the wonder of it all.

The entire building was constructed out of granite, and was a wonderful recreation of Ancient Griff and Pegan architecture—a pseudoperipteral structure welcomed those seeking knowledge, its imposing white columns supporting an entablature with the words 'MANEHATTAN PVBLIC LIBRARY' in the angular font typical of the Griff alphabet. Above it all, the pediment's tympanum had intricate carvings of pegasi and griffons holding various instruments of study, their heads all turned towards the center of the triangular space, their gazes locked to a carving of the sun and the moon, the latter superimposed over the former.

Past the majestic porch, Twilight could see that the building proper was a large domed-roofed structure; she realized it must be incredibly spacious inside—spacious enough to house thousands of books! Hundreds of thousands! As her heartbeat quickened and her chest tightened in excitement, Twilight briefly wondered if this is how Pinkie Pie felt *all the time*.

Trixie had to do a double-take at the idiotic look plastered on the lavender unicorn's face; was she *drooling*? Never mind that Twilight could apparently make mental deficiency look so adorable, The Great and Powerful Trixie was more worried about the good-natured jokes her new friends had made about Twilight's love of books—she had assumed that they were just having a little fun at the dark-maned pony's expense, but the look on her face was almost *lustful*.

Trixie blinked, her eyes turning to small dots as she managed to pinpoint that strange feeling suddenly brewing in the pit of her stomach. *'Impossible! Ridiculous! Simply beneath Trixie!'* There was no way she could be feeling jealous of a *building*, of all things! How could she even compete with that, anyways?

“Ohmygosh ohmygosh c'mon c'mon!” Twilight called from the door, waving her forelegs excitedly; when Trixie didn't immediately start moving, the lavender pony used her magic to telekinetically bring the other unicorn to the entrance of the library. The Slightly Miffed and Jealous Trixie let herself be floated into the building, expecting to be set back on the floor once inside. That's what she anticipated, but as she was guided directly towards Twilight's open forelegs and into a crushing hug, Trixie realized that she should really stop assuming normal behavior from this specific pony by now. “Thank you thank you THANK YOU!” squealed the bibliophile, hopping in place with the blue unicorn still in her grasp.

A security pony swiftly separated them and admonished Twilight for tearing through the library's quietude with her loud outburst and shrieking; meanwhile, a blushing Trixie couldn't help but look up towards the distinctive domed roof of the building and smirk boastfully—*Trixie 1, Library, 0*. Catching up to the lavender pony, she could see that the small run-in with the rent-a-cop had done little to dampen her spirits. The sight actually made Trixie smile a bit—Twilight was almost *glowing* with happiness.

Twilight skipped lightly towards the large, circular desk in the middle of the library, placed squarely beneath the skylight of the high dome that made up the roof. A small number of ponies sat within, occupied with busy work and with the tending of visitors. As she neared the desk, Twilight slowed her gait to appreciate the spacious public venue and its rows upon rows of very tall shelves that filled its cavernous hall; she could see all kinds of ponies going through the massive collection of books. Especially conspicuous were the pegasi fluttering about, since they could effortlessly reach the reading material without the use of ladders or magic.

Twilight briefly wondered if Ancient Pegans had become such an incredibly intellectual and scientifically thriving race *specifically* because they could reach any and all books when other pony races could not—the thought actually made her giggle a bit. *'And to think that Rainbow Dash of all ponies is descended from history's greatest minds!'* For many months now, Twilight had entertained a particular fantasy involving her chromatic friend: the day she would get to fill out the form required to grant Rainbow Dash a library card. *'A girl can dream...'*

“Good morning Miss, and welcome! May I ask what brings you to the Manehattan Public Library today?” Twilight was snapped away from her deviant thoughts by a cheery, deep purple pegasus that greeted her from behind the desk with a smile.

Twilight returned the warm smile, closing her eyes happily. “Yes, yes you may! I am looking for some books in the scientific field of loooooooooooooouuhhh—” Twilight drawled in panic as she immediately realized the critically grievous mistake she was in the process of making: Trixie was right there with her! How in Equestria was she going to read up on love with the Test Subject present? “...Looong... distance... teleportation.” she added evenly, her slightly swollen eye twitching a bit as she tried to will away her blush. At least it hadn't been a *complete* lie; she would need some reference to better introduce Trixie to the teleportation spell.

Both the pegasus and Trixie gave Twilight slightly confused and thoroughly unconvinced stares, even more so when the lavender pony tried to grin away the awkward silence that cut through the library's normal silence. A minute later, the silence was thankfully broken by the library worker, who quickly switched back to customer service mode. “Teleportation...?” The pegasus brought a hoof to her chin. “Well, they don't concentrate on teleportation specifically, but I can certainly show you a few hard science-fiction series that rely heavily on teleportation and faster-than-light travel.”

Twilight's face contorted into a half-grimace at the mention of the word 'fiction'. “...Or perhaps you were looking for speculative science material? We have some tapes in the audio-visual department in which well-known scientists are asked to give their opinion on things like teleportation, cryptids, and Extra-Equestrian life.” The pegasus watched as the lavender mare visibly paled at the suggestion, her mane sagging slightly. “Er, there's this series of comic books that—” The library worker stopped herself as Twilight's countenance became jaundiced. *'Was it something I said?'*

Twilight Sparkle shook off her momentary intellectual discomfort when she noticed the slightly distressed look on the librarian's face; the poor pegasus must really have no idea what to offer her. *'I suppose nopony's ever seriously researched teleportation...'* In all her years spent cooped up in libraries, she had never come across any scientific documentation on the subject—much less any account of anypony but the Princess actually performing the feat. “Um, you know what? I think I'll just browse around for a bit. Thanks anyways!” she explained, grinning sheepishly.

“Well alright, come find me if you need anything else; I'll be glad to give you any help I can.” replied the pegasus, fluttering away towards another pony that had just come up to the desk.

With a small sigh, Twilight turned to face Trixie, finding the magician with an insufferable smirk plastered across her face. “...What?” she asked, glowering slightly.

Trixie's smirk widened. “Twilight Sparkle, have you ever played poker?”

As a matter of fact, she had. “As a matter of fact, I have. Why do you ask?”

“You've never won a round of poker in your life, have you?” The sheer satisfaction in Trixie's voice was palpable.

Twilight's left eye twitched. “As a matter of fact...!” As a matter of fact, Trixie was entirely right. “...!” she replied smartly, her mane becoming slightly frazzled in her indignation. “...How did you know?” She was genuinely curious, not to mention genuinely peeved.

Trixie let out a short giggle-chuckle, managing to sound cute and condescending at the same time. “It's magic, Twilight Sparkle; Trixie does not owe you an explanation!”

“What?!”

Twilight shrank a bit as everypony nearby shushed her loudly; Manehattanites took their quiet time *seriously*. Trixie merely grinned at the embarrassed pony. “You, however, *do* owe Trixie an explanation,” she mentioned, casually motioning for the other unicorn to follow her down the main hall of the library.

Of course, Twilight knew what Trixie was getting at, but without reference books, how could she teach the azure mare? The spell itself was second-nature to Twilight, and it dawned on her that she had no idea of how to even begin explaining something that she performed almost subconsciously. *'Now that I think about it, nopony's ever asked me about this before!'* Did everypony just assume it was her special talent? *Was it* her special talent? The other two ponies with the ability to teleport were the Sun and Moon incarnate; that made her *technically* the only normal pony that could cast the spell.

Blinking, Twilight cast a quick, unnoticed glare at Trixie, who was trotting a few paces ahead of her. *'And Pinkie Pie does **not** count as a normal pony!'* Then again, wasn't magic itself her special talent? Perhaps her prodigious stores of raw magic allowed her to teleport. Princess Celestia herself had told Twilight that she'd never seen a pony with such potential; it could be that the energy needed was just too much for any other unicorn to muster in one go. *'Any way I look at it, I probably won't be able to teach Trixie the spell...'* She felt a small knot in her throat—part of her had been looking forward to having a student of her own, no matter how briefly. Then again, she had more important things to tend to: how was she going to make time for love research with Trixie at her side?

The pair of unicorns continued their walk in silence for a few moments longer before stepping up to a row of glass doors at the back of the library. The Great and Powerful Trixie actually held the door open for Twilight and ushered her out with a small bow; Twilight was pleasantly surprised at the gesture, and not so surprised at the fact that even during an act of genuine courtesy, the magician managed to seep arrogance. Could swagger be a special talent?

"Oh wow!" Twilight's eyes widened as she stepped out to a lush, well-maintained yard that was flanked by the building's wings on either side. It looked almost like a miniature version of the park back at Ponyville, down to the ornate, centrally-located fountain; the verdant garden contrasted starkly with the city skyline encircling the entire place. Looking around, she could see ponies of all kinds lounging about the breezy area, lost in their books.

Twilight blinked; how did Trixie know about this place? *'Clearly, she's been here before.'* Could it be? Could Trixie be... A scholar? *'Is that the reason why she wants to learn about teleportation?'* A surge of tingling giddiness shot through Twilight's spine at the thought of an eager, young, open mind asking her for instruction... And to think she was about to give up and tell Trixie it couldn't be done!

“Well, Twilight Sparkle? Trixie is wait—”

“And you shan't wait any longer, my faithful student!” Twilight exclaimed in utter jubilation, swiftly turning around to face her Test Subject.

'Faithful student?!' Trixie blinked. Shan't? “Did Twilight just make up that word?”

“Trixie, I don't know if you'll be able to learn this spell, but I'm definitely going to try to teach you!”

Trixie glared at the other unicorn. “And just what is that supposed to mean?”

“I don't mean to discourage you Trixie, but the first step to learning any new spell is to study all the facts beforehand, and in this case the fact is that this spell is entirely undocumented. There has never been any mention of it in any book or scientific journal I've ever read—as far as anypony knows, pony teleportation does not exist. it's probably impossible to—”

The Great and Powerful Trixie's scowl quickly turned into a smirk. “No other unicorn knows how to teleport?” she asked, her violet eyes shining. Impossible? That sounded like a *challenge*.

The lavender unicorn was slightly taken aback by Trixie's quick turnaround. “Uh, well, not that I know of...”

Trixie huffed disdainfully, tilting her head and grinning at a confused Twilight Sparkle. “So the white unicorn can't teleport either, is that correct?”

“White unicorn?” The librarian blinked. “Rarity? You mean Rarity?” she asked, receiving a curt nod from the azure pony. “She, she can't, I mean, I think the only reason *I* can is—”

“Then Trixie will learn to teleport.” she declared matter-of-factly as she took a few sure steps forward. Twilight blushed at the wide, self-assured smile on the other unicorn's face; her eyes appeared to burn with unfettered defiance. *Go on, tell Trixie she can't*, they seemed to say.

Twilight could feel herself getting redder and redder as the showmare stared her down; Trixie had unabashedly invaded her personal space in an aggressive show of confidence, *and it was working*. The bookworm was

momentarily paralyzed by what she hoped was Trixie's sheer arrogance, though she suspected it might actually be Trixie's proximity. And her imposing presence. And her beautiful eyes. And her toned, curvaceous "OK THEN!" Twilight Sparkle quickly teleported herself to the base of a tree a short distance away, startling a couple of ponies that were resting under its shade.

The Great and Powerful Trixie shook her head and blinked as she watched the flabbergasted ponies run away from the other unicorn. '*...What just happened...?*' Had she just made Twilight blush—without even trying? '*Trixie does not give herself enough credit!*' she smiled to herself; what an auspicious surprise! Trixie quickly began to wonder if she could make it happen again.

The azure pony hitched an eyebrow; why did the other mare blush in the first place, though? Trixie hadn't done anything out of the ordinary; perhaps Twilight was taken in by the magician's stunning countenance? Trixie's shining beauty was second only to her vast talent—it would only be natural for Twilight to be affected by its closeness. Of course, that didn't necessarily mean that the dark-maned pony had suddenly fallen in love with Equestria's most amazing unicorn—after all, it was a common enough occurrence for the showmare to have smitten ponies knocking at her dressing room door after every show; a blushing pony was nothing particularly new.

'But, it's a start.' If Twilight Sparkle managed to notice her obvious, truly spectacular good looks, then it was just a matter of time before the lavender unicorn fell for Trixie's winning personality and overflowing talent! Could she do it? Could she make Twilight Sparkle fall in love with her?

Trixie rolled her eyes. '*Such an unnecessary question; Trixie can do anything!*'

With that reassuring thought, the performer started calmly trotting up to the tree, looking upon the slightly frazzled unicorn waiting for her. '*Time to turn this not-date into a date!*' There was just one small problem, she realized—though many ponies had tried hopelessly to romance The Great and Powerful Trixie, no pony in Equestria had ever experienced the divine blessing of being courted by the showmare herself. Other than doing the opposite of whatever Rarity did to Twilight, Trixie was drawing a blank as to how to proceed on her new mission, though this did little to discourage her—in fact, it brought a small grin to her lips; it had *been a while* since she flexed her improv muscles!

Twilight Sparkle had her back to her approaching predator as she worked her mind for an explanation on the nature of teleportation; she figured that filling

her head with mathematical formulas would drive out her unscientific observations on Trixie's... physique. Of course, substituting *one* sexy thought for a *different* sexy thought was doing nothing to calm her nerves; she always *did* get a bit worked up by relativistic equations. '*Stupid, sexy Reinstein!*'

Twilight sighed; she had a feeling Trixie would not have the patience to be lectured on the finer points of time dilation and superluminal propagation of pony mass—she knew from first-hoof experience that almost nopony in Ponyville **or** Canterlot *ever* did.

'*What would Princess Celestia do?*' The lavender unicorn thought back to her early days as a sorceress apprentice—everything was so easy to visualize when her mentor explained it; Celestia's words were simple and straightforward, making sense of even the most abstract magical spells. Twilight raised her eyebrows—the Princess of the Sun *never* used math formulas when tutoring the dark-maned pony, did she? Looking back, Twilight wasn't even sure her beloved teacher even brought books with her half the time!

The studious pony smiled contentedly as she recalled the mantra Trixie had repeated earlier; Celestia would often recite it at the beginning of a study session, usually accompanying it with vivid images crafted from her powerful magic. The Solar Sage tended to speak with pictures when dispensing wisdom—a teaching method that Twilight once believed to be best saved for little foals too young to conceptualize magical math... Nowadays, the top-scoring student was quite grateful for her instructor's intuitive approach.

"Trixie thought that she... *shan't* wait any longer?"

Twilight jumped slightly, snapping out of her daydreams. "R-right, yes! Let's get right to it then, shall we?" she asked, turning to face the magician. Twilight yelped and backed into the tree behind her; Trixie had been standing rather close to her when she turned around. Feeling the heat reaching her face once more, Twilight immediately looked for a way to make some distance. "L-let's start with a demonstration of the spell!" she almost shouted, disappearing in crackle of magic before Trixie could even ask her to hold on for a second.

"Twilight Sparkle?" The Great and Powerful Trixie smiled, scanning the garden. "You dare hide from Trixie?" she asked teasingly, trotting towards the center of the yard. '*This is going to be fun! Now, where—*' Trixie came to an abrupt stop as she noticed two very familiar rainbows sprouting from the Clydesler Building's spire out in the distance. "What."

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“Ok I really really really really need your help!”

The deep purple pegasus blinked nervously at the unicorn that was currently holding her in the air with magic. It had caused her no small amount of dismay to be unceremoniously picked up from her desk and telekinetically pulled across the library and into a dark, lonely corner near the chemistry section.

“Um...?”

It was a panic-induced idea, but it was brilliant! While instructing Trixie on the finer details of teleportation, Twilight would have the perfect excuse to sneak into the library and collect some reading material for future study! Now she just needed a subtle way to ask for the books she required. “Here's my currently confounding conundrum: there's this annoying and adamantly arrogant magical mare that somepony I know may or may not have more-than-friendly feelings for. This however, is a seriously sensitive situation that calls for rigorous research and methodical measurement and involved investigations and organized observations and—”

“Oh.” The pegasus brought down her right hoof onto the sole of her left hoof as realization dawned on her. “You needed a book on love because you like that other girl?”

Twilight let out a frustrated grunt as she dispelled the magic surrounding the librarian—how did *everypony* manage to see through her so easily all the time?

“Now c'mon,” the pegasus gave her a cheeky smile, “let's start in the anatomy section!”