

## Once Upon a Gala

Another stitch, another thread in place. Piece by piece, snip by snip, like the many before. “Just keep it together,” the white unicorn said to herself, a small bead of sweat running down her tired face, “you’re a lady, and a lady does not despair. Oh, that stupid, incredibly famous pop star.” Who knew they could be so incredibly demanding?

Sapphire Shores had said five, Rarity distinctly remembered when she first entered her boutique. Five, five jewel studded outfits, not four, not six, and certainly not sixty.

“You only made five?” the stunned Sapphire had said to a dismayed Rarity, “Oh come on, you didn’t know what I meant? Honey, I need five dozen. You know, for all my back up singers and *their* costume changes. Obviously don’t make them as flashy as mine, I’m the star of the show and everypony has got to know it!” Rarity had balked at the number. She told her it wasn’t possible.

The pop diva had hardly been persuaded. “What, you can’t manage that? Sweetheart, I never had a problem when I placed an order with Hoity Toity or Calvin Kolt. They always got them done in a flash, best of the best baby, and if you can’t handle it, I guess I’ll just have to go to somepony else. Maybe to that other up and comer in Appleloosa. Or I could always go back to Hoity Toity.”

The prospect of losing a client, a very influential one at that, was the only thing that had persuaded her to somehow finish the order. That had been two days ago, and all that nonstop sewing had taken its toll on the young mare.

“Or I could always go back to Hoity Toity,” mocked the stressed dress maker as she pushed the fabric through the sewing machine’s needle, “Go back to Hoity Toity. Go take your business to some nopony in Appleloosa, what do I care?” A yawn escaped her. A couple rapid blinks fought back the fatigue. “Oh of course I care, why else would I bother?” Her eyes lost focus for a moment, she failed to prevent another yawn from leaving her lips. It seemed another cup of coffee was in order. As she wondered if she still had any sugar, her control over her magic wavered for just a second; the fabric jammed up into the needle.

“Oh dear, not again.” How many more outfits were there left to make? She checked ... and then wished she hadn’t. The pony scratched at her already disheveled hair, struggling to maintain her composure. “But the customer is always right, yes, and if I’m to make a name for myself, then sacrifice and toil I shall. Isn’t that right, my lovely Opal?”

Opalescence growled, apathetically stretching herself out on Rarity’s bed. “I knew you’d agree, you always do,” Rarity said with a sigh. “Now, scissors, where are the scissors? Come out scissors, I know you’re around here somewhere. How I am going to

get that fabric out without scissors? Of all the things to lose. Urghh!” She blessed Applejack for agreeing to baby-sit Sweetie Belle. The little filly was a handful on a regular day. *Let her and her little cutie mark crusading troop play somewhere else*, she thought, glimpsing the gleam of a shiny metal blade on top a cluttered table, the blade partially concealed by a roll of white fabric. *I have no time for games.*

She walked toward the table, only now realizing it was night once more. Through her opened window the glow of the moonlight made itself welcome in her boutique. She took the scissors under her spell, and was about to turn back to the awaiting sewing machine when she paused. Struck by the beauty of the evening, and seeking just a moment’s tranquility, she gazed up at the evening sky. The moon was full, the image of the Mare of the Moon had long disappeared from its surface, leaving it a glowing mix of slightly blotched grey areas and patches of pure white, the whole thing brilliant in its illumination. It shined among the stars of a calm, cloudless night.

Under the moon, as was everything else not in the sky, and a very far distance away, perhaps even farther away than the moon itself, and along the largest cliff-side in the land was the castle of the princesses, the Crown Jewel of Canterlot and of a proud Equestria. Even from so far a distance she could make out of the bright lights of the castle windows. One of them went dark, its tiny light snuffed out like a candle’s flame being blown out.

Rarity laid her head among the fabrics and random utensils scattered about her table. To the corner of the room was her pink gown, the one her friends had finished for her for the Grand Galloping Gala. It was their gift to her, for her gift to them. She cherished it, had it protected with a very special spell for the day that she would finally get to wear it. The date of the Gala wouldn’t be too much longer, would it? And perhaps, she’d even find Him. Could he, would he be there? She closed her eyes for just a moment, smiling as she saw Him. “Why, are you there, my future love? My handsome prince?”

The castle was beautiful. She was in awe as she made her way through the long doors of the throne room. The stained glass windows shimmered crystal clear with its images of Equestria, of the sun and the moon, and depictions of things even further out into the reaches of the known sky. Colorful banners hung high above, bearing the shields of the Equestrian nobility for all to see. The full moon shone brightly, the sky cleared for the event. The princesses were stunning.

“The Lady Twilight Sparkle of the Eternal Capital City of Canterlot.” spoke the herald, announcing her entrance into the awe-inspiring court chambers. The violet unicorn was elegant in every way, her gait calm and measured as she made her way down the long red carpet of the grand, spacious, marbled white halls of the throne room. The Equestrian nobility and guests marveled at her grace, and why not; she had been sired and raised in Canterlot; elegance came naturally for a pony of her lineage.

“The Mademoiselle Rainbow Dash of the Majestic Aerial City of Cloudsdale.”

Who knew a tomcolt like her could behave so lady-like? Underneath that veneer of reckless adventurism was a mare of the highest class, and on that evening, among the best of Equestria, she showed her true feathers.

“The-” the herald stopped upon seeing the name, “oh dear Luna not *her*,” he bemoaned under his breath, “The - uh,” he finally managed to announce, “The um, *Mademoiselle* Pinkie Pie of the Fair Town of Ponyville.”

Pinkie Pie was being Pinkie Pie, what else was there to say? Well, she looked nice at least. Despite the behavior of that very silly filly, Rarity’s heart skipped a beat. It was finally her turn to be introduced to a court full of noblesponies and the wealthy. This was the moment she had always envisioned, that once and a lifetime moment. She stepped forward once Applejack quickly pulled the hopping Pinkie Pie toward Twilight and the rest of her friends.

“The Mademoiselle Rarity, Commissioned Dress Designer for the Royal Court of Equestria, of the Fair Town of Ponyville.”

Down the steps she went, slowly, step by step. She recognized many of the faces among the crowd of gentlecolts and fillies, some her clients, others she knew only by their reputations.

And they all loved her. How they admired her, how they wondered how a such a sophisticated mare could be from such a simple town like Ponyville. She held her head high, gazing at none in particular, except for her dearest friends. They all smiled at her, and she smiled back. The day’s celebrations had gone well for all of them. Applejack’s penchant for the sale had rewarded her most generously, Pinkie Pie had a wonderful time during the morning and afternoon festivities, so much so as to have acquired for herself a rather... unsavory reputation. Rainbow Dash had performed a sensational, death defying stunt during the air show, the mare as glorious in the air as she was graceful in her stunning gown. Fluttershy had skipped the ball, opting instead to occupy her time among the flora and fauna of the Royal Garden. Her decision was a bit of a letdown for Rarity, the pony would have been so adored among the gentry, but that was her choice, and in truth, she was so happy among the blooming flowers and exotic wildlife, why dare spoil her fun? And Twilight Sparkle, she was simply glad that her friends were glad.

As for Rarity, things hadn’t turned out quite as she had hoped. Princess Celestia’s nephew, the one and only prince in the land, was already betrothed to a princess of another country. Was her stallion among the crowd then? She saw nopony that held her attention. But she could only hope.

The night continued on. The music of the court played, the classical instruments in harmony with the tweets and songs of the brightly colored birds of the royal choir. The

gowns flowed, the dancers twirled, her friends danced with the most wealthy and noble of all the land. As for the violet-maned unicorn, well, perhaps even a place as magical as Canterlot couldn't grant every wish. Twilight Sparkle, not particularly interested in meeting a colt for herself, danced with her.

It was not quite what Rarity had desired, but what had she really expected, she wondered, that the prince would fall for her? Perhaps she was simply, incurably romantic. She had seen the whole pretty picture in detail months before. She could even see it now: The Young Prince, bowing to the assembly. Suddenly he stops, he looks up, he gasps in wonder. There she stands, alone, the girl of his dreams. Who she is or when she came he knows not, nor does he care. But his heart tells him that here, here is the maiden predestined to be his bride.

Rarity giggled at her own silliness. A pretty plot for a fairy tale, to be sure, but in real life, oh no, no! She supposed that such a fantasy was foredoomed to-

"Twilight?" asked Rarity, suddenly aware that the mare had stopped dancing. Twilight looked back, a small glimmer in her eye and her horn glowing violet. She smiled as she motioned towards something behind her. The white unicorn turned around, and gasped.

Who he was or when he came from she knew not, nor did she care. The colt had a coat of pure white, his cutie mark the image of a faintly azul moon, his pure black mane well groomed, and his eyes radiating a piercing blue. What an odd combination, she thought, nevertheless enchanted by his handsomeness, and by the kindness in his eyes. It was like a dream come true.

She tentatively offers her hoof to the strange stallion. He takes it and kisses her gently. She swoons, and allows him to lead her away from the gentry, the fairy-like Twilight watching as she casts a spell.

Rarity's gown changes from its pink colour to a sparkling sky blue. Seconds later it turns back, and then back again, the colors alternate with a twinkle of each few steps. Neither the colt nor the mare notice, or if they do they pretend not to. The rest of the court does however; they watch in awe as the two bow and curtsy in perfect timing to the beginning notes of the waltz and dance away toward the Royal Garden. All of the garden's flowers are in full bloom for the first time in over a year, their beauty is accentuated by the stars and the moon high above. The pair gaze into each other's eyes, lost in the moment as they make their way through the garden. Not a single petal is disturbed by their joy. The ponies of the court lose sight of them, the two hidden by flowers both large and small, and all absolutely magnificent.

But Fluttershy spies them, she watches as the two dance to the rhythm of a faint, distant song. She picks a blue rose, and as Rarity swings by, she swiftly slides it into her mane. Rarity doesn't even notice, but the stallion does, and kisses the unicorn's cheek.

Rarity blushes, her gown and even the rose itself shift to a bright pink to match her flustered cheeks.

Not a single word passes between the two. What is there to say? She finally finds what she was searching for, the foredoomed fantasy not so foredoomed after all. *So this is love*, considers the stricken mare. And as the two stop by a crystal clear pool, they look at the stars, their hooves touching ever so gently. Slowly they turn to each other, the blushing Rarity gazes up at her prince. Is he one really, she wonders. Does it really matter? With eyes that glow with a cool radiance they move to kiss. It's so close, and she can almost feel his lips on her own. Almost.

The clock strikes twelve, and tears run down her sad eyes.

"Oh dear me!" cried out a surprised Rarity, accidentally knocking a jug of pencils from her table in a bout of momentary confusion. The bell tower struck a second time, and a third time, much to the fashionista's horror. "Midnight? Oh no!" Rarity exclaimed, raising herself from her table. So much work to be done, so many outfits to design, and so little time left to fashion them. She couldn't believe herself, how had she let herself fall asleep like that? How utterly detestable!

"Oh you bad cat," she said at the sleeping Opal, "why didn't you wake me?"

Opal only yawned, partially opening her eyes and stretching herself out before going back to sleep. The frazzled unicorn half heartedly smiled. "I suppose you're right. Still, no time for idol chit chat, time to get back to work. There's no rest for the weary after all. Heh. Now, what was I looking for? Scissors!"

As she took the scissors back into her spell, trying to recall what she needed them for in the first place, she turned back for a moment, and looked at the moon high above. She smiled, and this time not so half heartedly.

"And they all lived happily ever after. One day. Maybe."

To the far distance the windows of the great castle shine brightly. A single light goes out.