

# The Mane Event

## Part Three

“...and then it turned me back to normal and we left.”

“You’re kidding me! She actually stared down a Cockatrice and got it to reverse something it already turned into stone?”

“What can I say? She does have a way with animals.”

“That’s amazing. What was it like, being stone?”

“Truthfully, I don’t remember much from when it happened. I just remember that it was very cold, and dark. It doesn’t kill you, being turned to stone; it just makes you kind of...stop. There’s this incredible feeling of being alone. Nothingness. You know that no one can help you, and you’re doomed to stay that way forever. Unless you happen to know Fluttershy, apparently.”

“Wow, that’s horrible. I’m sorry. I’m glad you’re okay now, Twilight.”

“Thanks, Trixie.”

The two unicorn ponies had taken their time getting back to Ponyville. After saying goodbye to Steven, and making promises to visit him again soon, they set off at an unhurried pace. Twilight was reiterating to Trixie some of the crazy adventures she’d had these past months in Ponyville. They were so caught up in the stories, they didn’t even notice they’d left the forest and were almost into town. Being so inattentive, Trixie didn’t notice the large puddle of mud directly in front of her. She tripped when her hoof dropped down into it, nearly tumbling face-first into the dirty water. Fortunately, Twilight noticed her starting to fall and levitated the pony to safety.

Trixie let out a relieved sigh and took stock of her surroundings. It was very nearly dark. She could almost see Luna dutifully raising the moon on the horizon. The sky was gray and overcast. A light rain was still drizzling over the entire town; a remnant of the fierce storm the pegasus ponies had created earlier that day. “At least the weather is keeping most ponies inside.” Trixie said, “We won’t have to deal with random passers-by.”

“Right.” Twilight replied. “I doubt everypony would be pleased to see you right now. Let’s just get to Rarity’s shop.”

Twilight took the lead and directed her new friend through town. They snuck their way into the Carousel Boutique. Twilight entered first, causing the shop bell to ring as she opened the door. She was about to yell out a greeting to Rarity, but she heard strained voices arguing farther inside.

“I’m sorry Ms. Rarity, I can’t accept these! Neither dresses nor tickets. They aren’t ours, so I won’t let them be taken. She didn’t follow orders, talked to strange ponies. Shouldn’t be rewarded for that.”

Twilight wasn't especially familiar with the voice raising these objections, but thought in the back of her mind that she recognized it from somewhere.

"But you must look your best for the Gala! Consider it a gift to the event rather than yourselves. These dresses will make you both look so wonderful!"

That, however, was a voice Twilight knew all too well. But why was Rarity arguing with a customer like that?

"We're not going, we can't. They're not ours to take."

Twilight decided it would be better not to interrupt the spat, but was still curious as to its subject. She motioned to Trixie to be quiet, and crept closer to the voices. She positioned herself against a wall outlining Rarity's workspace from the rest of the shop and listened.

"I can't take charity like this. A pony should work for their keep, and mine didn't get these. A unicorn, Dinky said, and what unicorn goes to fancy parties and makes dresses for fancy parties? Rarity!"

Twilight gasped quietly, quickly stifling her sound. Of course! Derpy...er....was it Ditzzy? Either way, the mailmare was mad her filly had taken those tickets without her knowing it. And she thought Rarity was behind it. Twilight filled in the rest of the story quite well with her inductive powers: Dinky must have talked about the tickets at school. Sweetie Belle then told her sister about it and Rarity, given her generous nature, would instantly set about making dresses for them both to wear. Derpy came to the shop to try and give the tickets back and found Rarity busy making dresses for them, cementing Rarity as the mysterious ticket-giver in her mind.

Hoping to diffuse the situation, Twilight gave up her sneaking ways and entered the room with the arguing ponies. She had guessed everything correctly with one exception: she hadn't figured on Derpy bringing Dinky with her to the shop.

Dinky's face contorted horribly when Twilight trotted confidently into the room. She had been diligent in keeping her promise to Twilight from that morning, but let it slip that a unicorn had given her the tickets. Poor little Dinky's heart had been dropping all afternoon. First, her mom was mad that she'd talked to a stranger. Dinky tried to explain that she sort of knew the pony, but that didn't convince her. Then, her mom wanted to give the tickets back, saying they hadn't earned them. Rarity held strong, however, and Dinky was just getting hopeful about being able to go to the Gala again when Twilight appeared. Dinky immediately assumed she was here to take back the tickets for breaking their promise, and it took all of the tiny filly's effort not to burst into tears.

"Twilight, dear!" Rarity said when she saw her friend. "I was just explaining to this very sweet mail pony here why she simply has to let me design a dress for her and her precious little filly." She then turned and looked at Derpy directly, saying, "Please, excuse us for a second."

Rarity took Twilight to the side, putting her hoof heavily across Twilight's shoulders and whispered angrily, "And maybe *you* can tell me why she has two tickets to the Grand Galloping Gala? I believed I specified a pony with class and dignity?"

"She obviously has too much of both." Twilight whispered back, "If she had a little less, she would have greedily snapped up the tickets, instead she thinks we pity her."

“Still, I didn’t want to have to make two new dresses the night before the Gala. But they have absolutely nothing to wear, I’m sure.” Rarity said, knowing she lost the first argument but still determined to elicit some guilt from her friend, “I can’t have them showing up without at least a decent saddle to the most spectacular event in Equestria.”

“About that…” Twilight began. “Actually, I’ll tell you later.” She stood up, brushing Rarity’s hoof off and talking to Derpy, who’d stood across the room patiently while Dinky fidgeted next to her. “Ma’am, I assure you, your filly did nothing wrong. Dinky is an excellent young pony.”

“Excellent? She tries to trick her mother, takes things from strangers, won’t tell her where they came from? This is excellent?”

“I’m sorry, those were all my fault.” Twilight began, trying to calm the excited mare. “You see, I didn’t want…this to happen. I was afraid if you knew where they came from, you wouldn’t take the tickets. I just thought you and your filly deserved a nice break after all you’ve gone through. I thought the Grand Galloping Gala would be a great way to relieve some stress and have a good time.”

“You? Twilight Librarian gave these to my Dinky?”

“Yes, ma’am. I told her not to let you know who gave them to her. I just wanted it to be a happy surprise. And now Rarity is offering to make dresses for the both of you, like she did for me and a few of my other friends as well. She is very giving like that, and the two of us think you would simply adore the Gala.”  
“It’s not our place, Ms. Twilight.” Derpy began, trying another tactic to get rid of these tickets. “We can’t go to a fancy celebration. We aren’t fancy ponies, just simple Ponyville folk.”

“The Gala is a celebration of all pony life.” Twilight said, “If a pony as unsophisticated as Applejack can go, you certainly can too.”

“Still, it’s not ours. Take them back. We’ll go when we earn it.”

Twilight smiled. She saw in Derpy’s eyes…well, the eye that looked at her straight…that Derpy had no more good reasons not to go. Now Twilight was ready to play her trump card. “I’m sorry, but they’re yours now. I offered the tickets to Dinky, and she accepted of her own free will. When that happened, the tickets were bound magically to her. Then, she gave them to you, and you accepted them from her. So now, the tickets are bound to you. They can’t be stolen away, and won’t leave until someone accepts them willingly with you giving them willingly. I won’t take them back, and you can’t make me.”

“Then I’ll just give them to somepony else.”

“And will they have earned it?” Twilight asked, catching Derpy in her own logic. “Less so than you, since they’d get tickets given out of guilt. I gave them to make a good little filly happy. I had hoped to make that filly’s mom happy too, but it seems I couldn’t do that.”

“But…but…”

“Please mama…can’t we go?”

Dinky finally spoke. She had been waiting patiently throughout the argument, her hope being renewed

each time Twilight spoke. She realized now that nopony wanted to take the tickets from her mom, and they would simply be wasted if they decided not to attend the Gala. Because of this, Dinky put on her best pleading face and approached her mother. Derpy looked at her filly's sad face, took a glance at Twilight and Rarity, both waiting for her response. She turned back to Dinky and softened her features into a gentle smile. "I guess we have no choice, little one." She replied.

Dinky practically jumped onto Derpy and wrapped her hooves around her mother's neck in a big hug. Derpy looked at both Rarity and Twilight and said, "Thank you for such kindness." She then looked at Rarity and asked, "Tomorrow to pick up the dresses? Early morning?"

"Yes dear, come here just after your mail route. Oh, I forgot. No mail tomorrow. School's off too, isn't it?" Rarity said, looking at Dinky.

"Yes ma'am" The small unicorn replied happily.

"Well then, you two need to get some beauty sleep. A big day is ahead of you tomorrow!" Rarity said, practically shooing them from her shop. They passed out of the room and straight through the shop. Trixie was still pressing herself against the separating wall. Fortunately for her, Derpy and Dinky didn't look back, and Rarity and Twilight didn't advance out of the room as they left. She had heard the entire conversation between the four, and realized how caring Twilight Sparkle was.

She had had a slight lingering doubt in the back of her mind since seeing Twilight in the forest. She thought that, just maybe, Twilight wanted to get some sort of revenge for the fiasco with the Ursa Minor. But a pony who could go so far for kindness surely wouldn't put even more effort into revenge.

Still, Trixie stayed put in her hiding place. She knew barging in on that confrontation was a bad idea, and now thought that Twilight would introduce her when the time was right. She stood still, tried to hide her breathing, and listened again. She heard Rarity say: "How did you know they were here, Twilight?"

"I didn't" her purple friend responded, "I came here for something else. Though I'm starting to think it may be impossible."

"What did you need?"

"Well, I was hoping you could make me another dress for the Gala tomorrow."

"Oh Twilight, I'm just barely going to be able to finish these two and get to bed at a reasonable hour. I'm sorry, but the last disaster with dresses helped me learn my limits. I simply couldn't finish a third dress by tomorrow."

"I understand, Rarity. Don't worry about it." Twilights said, turning to go.

"Wait a minute, dear." Rarity said, "What happened to the first dress I made you? Did it get ruined? I told you not to wear it until the Gala."

"No, no, it's fine."

"Then why do you need another one? Do you not like it? I thought-"

"No, Rarity, stop." Twilight said, afraid to go down that all-too-familiar path. "The dress is perfect. There's no problem with it. I just wanted another one for...a friend is all."

"Oh, ho! I understand, Twilight, you don't need to be sheepish with me." Rarity said with a knowing wink. "I've seen that look before. You don't need to hide things from me dear. I see the signs all too well. Being evasive, asking for things for a 'friend'. Yes, those are just the signs of a pony who finally became interested in fashion! Well, let me tell you, I have loads of dresses that would look just dandy on you here in the shop. Now, they won't be as wonderful as the dress tailored specifically for your style and personality, but of excellent quality nonetheless."

Rarity walked excitedly away from her sewing table as she talked, leading Twilight back into the front end of the store. She went right past the hiding Trixie and straight to a rack of dresses near the front of the store.

"These here are a bit too summery. You need a good, dark base color to show off your coat. Perhaps this one here. Oh! I know! I've got just the design against the back wall here. Come, let me show...YOU!"

Rarity finally noticed her uninvited guest, and flared with anger at Trixie. She remembered vividly the heinous crime Trixie had committed against her hair. Green? Honestly. Do what you want to a pony, call them names or be cruel, whatever you wish. But to commit an act of violence against fashion? That was inexcusable in Rarity's eyes. Her horn shone brightly as she yelled at the frightened blue unicorn. "So, you've come back to finish the job, have you? First my hair, then my dresses? I won't stand for it!"

"Rarity, wait." Twilight said, jumping in between Rarity and her prey. "She's not here to destroy your dresses. She's here because I asked her to be."

"What? But Twilight, why?"

"I'm taking her as my date to the Gala."

"WHAT?!" Rarity yelled out again. "But Twilight, you can't! Her brand of boasting and unsupported bravado is exactly what the Gala doesn't need! You can't take her; she'll be a blight on the whole party!"

"See? I knew it." Trixie said, finally breaking her self-imposed vow of silence. "No pony will accept me here, Twilight. It was a nice gesture, but it was just silly to think I belonged in Ponyville."

Trixie started for the door, but Twilight quickly blocked the only exit. "Trixie, wait. You can't expect them to forgive you without even asking for it. You did leave without making amends last time. And Rarity," Twilight added, speaking a bit louder, "Don't be so quick to judge other ponies. Trixie did come off a bit...rough last time she was in town, but we're going to make it right. I'm not going to lose a potential friend just because some ponies can't forget the past."

"Well fine." Rarity said, with harshness lingering in her words. "I did overact a bit. Still, I won't be letting a pony like her appear in one of *my* original creations. She can go somewhere else to find a dress."

Twilight was about to protest when Trixie looked at her sadly and said, "I understand, Rarity. I hurt your pride that day. I did it intentionally, and I did it to make myself look better. I'm sorry. I'm sorry for what I did, and I'm sorry for the reason I did it. I hope someday you can forgive me, but I realize that day is not today. Goodbye, Rarity."

Trixie quickly swept past Twilight and out the door. Twilight looked at Rarity, opened her mouth as if to speak, closed it, and followed Trixie outside. Trixie was standing in the drizzle, looking up at the now-dark sky. A slight chill was in the air and Trixie shivered. Twilight stepped close to her and saw that the wetness on her face wasn't just from the rain. She said gently, "Why don't we go back to my place for tonight? I'll think of something for you to wear."

"Thanks, Twilight." Trixie said, and followed her silently back to the tree house.

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"No, nuh-uh. No way. Nyet. Nein. Can I be putting this any clearer?"

"Spike, she's just going to stay the night. You'll hardly notice her."

"I don't want her here. What if she decides to do something to me?"

"What would she do?"

"I don't know...turn me into a newt or something?"

"A newt?"

"Yeah, those things are slimy, and disgusting."

"Why would she do that?"

"Because she's evil."

Twilight was arguing about, of course, Trixie staying the night at the tree house.

"She's not evil, Spike. She was just a bit overanxious to prove her worth."

"Still, I don't like it and I don't want to sleep anywhere near her."

"You don't have to." Twilight finally decided that it wasn't worth getting Spike's approval and laid down the final, irrefutable argument, "This is my tree house, and I get to decide who can and can't be in here. I decide that she can. If you can't deal with that, there's no reason you have to stay here tonight."

Trixie had been standing not three meters away, listening to the two argue as if she wasn't there. It was a strange feeling for her, to be ignored like this. She was used to being the center of attention, though she had been working to get over that craving. Still, the sight of someone arguing over her was a bit unsettling. She wanted other ponies to like her again, but the task seemed like it would be harder than she initially thought.

"Well, I still don't like it."

"You don't have to like it, Spike. It's going to happen."

"Fine." He said, stomping off in the direction of their shared bedroom. "Just don't wake me, and don't make me talk to her."

Twilight sighed and looked at her guest. "Sorry about Spike. I think he's still upset about what you did to Rarity. He's got a major crush on her."

"Oh. I can see where that would make him angry." Trixie replied, not sure of what else to say.

"I figured out what to do about the dress situation." Twilight said, opening up her saddlebag and levitating her dress from within. She laid it on the counter top, and straightened out a few creases that had developed from its time folded up. "I have this one Rarity made for me, and.." she broke off the sentence to enter the bedroom. She came trotting out with a far inferior dress. Its main color was red, but had yellow sleeves and two big yellow buttons on the underside. "I have this one she fixed up for me too! So we have two dresses. Isn't that just perfect?"

Twilight was obviously very pleased with herself, and Trixie didn't want to dampen her mood, so she put on a brave smile and replied, "Yeah, that sure is lucky." She needed to quickly change the subject to not give away her disappointment. "So, where am I supposed to sleep?"

"I forgot all about that." Twilight said, her eyes expanding and retracting in one quick motion. "I don't have any extra beds. I guess we'll just have to share one."

"Twilight Sparkle." Trixie said with faked indignation, "You claim to have no amorous feelings for me, but proposition to sleep with me in the same bed even before our first date? I must say I'm shocked."

"Wha? Bwah, um, not like that!" Twilight was obviously flustered. She really was too innocent to hold her own against Trixie. Trixie laughed softly and decided to let Twilight off the hook early. "Haha, oh dear, I know you didn't mean it like that." She smiled and continued. "Well, I assume the bedroom's through there?"

"Um, yes." Twilight said, after Trixie motioned with her hoof to the bedroom. The whole idea had become much more awkward for her after Trixie's joke at her expense.

Trixie walked toward the room and said, "If it's alright with you, I'm going to bed right away. It's been a long time since I've had a mattress and fresh sheets."

"Oh right, about that." Twilight said, "I was wondering if you wouldn't mind...well...taking a bath before going to bed?"

Trixie looked at Twilight and saw that she was wrinkling her nose at the thought of Trixie going straight into her bed. Trixie would have been offended at Twilight's demand, except that she had to admit the weeks in the wilderness had not been kind to her appearance. She tried to bathe often, but without the luxurious shampoos and soaps created by the best pony crafts workers, her mane had simply lost its sheen. Her coat had become coarse, and the pleasant berry smell emanating from her body had been eliminated by the harsh conditions of life in the Everfree Forest.

Trixie nodded and said, "Which way?"

Twilight pointed out the bathroom and left to go to sleep herself. Trixie started up the water and added a healthy amount of bubbles, glad to finally have indoor plumbing again. She stood in the tub, carefully

washing her mane and tail first, then moving on to brushing her coat. She thought about how much harder this whole process must be for ponies without magic, and silently thanked Celestia she didn't have to worry about that. She eventually finished the process, dried herself off with a fresh towel, and admired herself in the mirror.

"Mmm, you *are* a gorgeous pony." She said to her reflection. "Everypony's going to want to dance with you at the Gala. Oh...I can't wait." She smiled once more at her own image and followed Twilight and Spike's paths into the bedroom. The two were already sleeping, Spike in his tiny bed on the floor and Twilight higher up on the ledge, resting on one side in a spacious, soft-looking bed. Trixie, looking forward to sleeping in a proper bed again, walked to it immediately and slipped in under the sheets. She laid down on her side and placed her top two hooves over the sleeping Twilight. Twilight's body recoiled a little, and she sleepily mumbled something unintelligible. Trixie buried her muzzle into the hair of Twilight's mane and smiled. She thought how, if somepony had told her this morning that she'd end the day sharing a bed with a beautiful unicorn, she would have told them just how crazy they were.

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The day had finally arrived. Everypony who was anypony knew about the Gala, and all of Ponyville knew that The Elements of Harmony each had a ticket. They were all expecting something spectacular that day. Some said a grand royal party would be bringing them all to Canterlot, some said the Princess herself would be in Ponyville to guide her champions to the celebration, others said the elements would have to get their own travel, as the Princess was much too busy to worry about something like that. Still others had heard rumors that the ponies were bringing dates, and waited around to see who the chosen pony was for each.

The town was stirring early and Equestria was still cloaked in pre-dawn darkness when Twilight awoke to the sound of heavy breathing in her ear. She wanted to jump out of bed, but felt pressure keeping her down across her side. She relaxed for just a second and quickly deduced that it was Trixie. Twilight immediately regretted inviting her into her bed for the night, but had to admit the warmth from Trixie's body did feel very nice. So nice that she wanted to just...drift back...into...'NO!' she thought, this time actually jumping out of bed and onto the floor. She remembered how important today was, and instantly shook away the desire to fall back asleep.

"Trixie, Spike, wake up." She said, excited. "It's morning!"

"What? No it isn't, Twilight." Spike said, rubbing his eyes. "It's still dark"

"Right, but we've got to get ready." She said. "The chariots are coming to pick us up in just over an hour." "Isn't that plenty of time?" Trixie asked, rousing herself from her slumber.

"Just barely. We've got to eat, wash and style our hair, get dressed-"

"Okay, I get it." Spike said, standing up and stretching his arms wide. "Let's go." He walked over to the kitchen, stumbling a little on his still-wobbly legs.

Twilight smiled at Trixie as Spike left and followed him out the door. The two unicorns and dragon had a quick breakfast. Spike went right to work making sure each and every scale was perfectly straight before donning a small tuxedo with cane and top-hat that Rarity had sewn for him. Twilight and Trixie, in the meantime, had washed their manes and tails in the bathtub and set about drying and straightening them,



Trixie adding a slight curl at the end of hers. Their hair now perfectly set, the mares walked back into the main room. Trixie began to levitate the red dress and started to put it on.

“What are you doing?” Twilight asked.

“I’m putting on my dress. What does it look like I’m doing?”

“No, Trixie. I’m wearing that dress. This one’s yours.” Twilight said, pointing toward Rarity’s masterpiece.

“Twilight, I couldn’t let you do that. That dress was made just for you.”

“But look at it, covered in stars, the different shades of blue playing off each other expertly. Trixie, this dress will look so much better on you.”

Trixie looked deep into Twilight’s eyes and saw how excited she was to offer this to Trixie. Trixie was not familiar with the pleasure one gets from giving a gift to a friend, so she didn’t understand why Twilight would look so happy to wear the obviously worse dress to the Gala. “Really, it’s alright Twilight. You should wear your dress, and I’ll wear this one.”

“Come on Trixie, I’m trying to make you happy, here.” Twilight said, realizing she’d have to spell it out for the blue unicorn. “The point of these two days is to make you happy. I want you to have a wonderful time today, and the best way to do that is in this dress. Think how wonderful you’ll look. Think of all the stallions that will turn their heads at the beautiful blue unicorn in a stunning dress. Please Trixie, wear this one.”

She couldn’t resist an outpouring of the heart like that. Trixie graciously set down Twilight’s red dress and picked up the flowing blue one. The two unicorns finished dressing in silence, the hand-crafted gown fitting Trixie like a glove. They turned toward the bedroom door as Spike, clad in his tuxedo burst through the door with a confident, “So how do I look, ladies?”

The two giggled in unison. Twilight said, “You look wonderful, Spike. The fillies won’t be able to keep their hooves off of you.”

“I’m not after the fillies. I only go for real mares, like Rarity.” Spike said, keeping up his cocky persona. “So then, shall we go?”

“It is about time.” Twilight said, “Let’s go meet everypony else.”

The three stepped out of the tree house and into Ponyville. They were surprised to see so many ponies already out and about in the town square. A small crowd was gathering, each hoping for something different and amazing to happen. Among the numerous other ponies, Twilight noticed Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash being interrogated by an inquisitive group. They began to walk up to them when one of the ponies in the surrounding crowd let out a yell: “TRIXIE!”

Twilight recoiled at the sound. She was afraid that some citizens would be sore at her choice of companion, but she was hoping to leave with her to the Gala mostly unnoticed. She hadn’t thought a crowd like this would appear to see them off. She turned to face the voice, expecting the worst. She saw two small unicorns galloping at top speeds toward them. She recognized them instantly, one short and stout with a teal colored body and dark orange mane. The other unicorn was slightly taller, but still shorter

than either Twilight or Trixie. He sported a creamy orange-brown coat with teal mane. The two stopped just short of Trixie, almost crashing into her side. Upon stopping Snips and Snails both began talking a mile a minute to the object of their flame.

“Trixie! I can’t believe it! You’re back!”

“We missed you much, where’d you go?”

“Wow, you sure look pretty in that dress.”

“Did you learn any new magic tricks to show us?”

“Can I get you anything?”

“Are you going to stay with us for a while?”

“Please don’t go away again, Trixie.”

“Boys, Boys! Please, contain yourselves.” Trixie said, trying to calm her crazed admirers. “I understand your enthusiasm. You are right to love The Great and Powerful Trixie, but now is not the time.”

“What do you mean, oh Great and Powerful Trixie?” They asked in unison.

“This fine mare here is my date today. You’ll just have to wait until we’re done. As you know boys, a lady doesn’t leave her escort. It isn’t fair. It isn’t nice.”

“Hey wait. Great and Powerful Trixie, isn’t that a-“

“No, no it’s not...um...Snails, right?” Trixie said, stealing a quick look at the brown pony’s flank.

“Oh, she remembered my name!” Snails said, turning to his portly friend.

“Wow! I can’t believe it. Do you remember mine too, Trixie?”

“Was it...um...Scissors?” She said, once again trying to guess based on his cutie mark.

“Ha! I get a nickname from her!” Snips said, bragging right back to his friend. “That proves she likes me better than you.”

“Nuh-uh!” Snails said, not noticing that Twilight and Trixie were already sneaking slowly away for them. “It just means she hasn’t thought of a good one for me yet. It’ll be even better than yours.”

“No way. Mine’s already perfect, so how could yours be better?”

The two friends stood there arguing. In the meantime Trixie and Twilight had made their way to Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash. The small crowd surrounding them parted with a collective gasp at Trixie. A murmur went up throughout them, wondering where she came from and why she was in such a stunning dress. Rainbow Dash looked at Trixie in anger and asked Twilight, “What’s she doing here?”

“She’s my date.” Twilight replied in a matter-of-fact tone.

“Oh, I see. I’m glad you found somepony to take.” Fluttershy said softly, Angel perched on her hindquarters.

“So, you and her are...y’know...uh huh?” Dash asked, making odd motions with her hooves.

“Don’t be silly, Dashie!” Pinkie Pie said, appearing suddenly behind her. “Twilight just wanted to make friends with Trixie, so she went out to the Everfree forest and found her and is bringing her to the Gala.”

The party pony and her date, Blues had arrived mid conversation. She was dressed just like her best friends, clad in the special outfit Rarity had made for each of them. Hers was a fashionable take on a soda jerk uniform, complete with dainty hat, one blue and white-striped bow on each hoof, and beautiful pink dress with candy cane designs. Blues was dressed in a much more standard outfit: a blue sequin-studded suit, a white undershirt with a red tie, and a blue pinstriped fedora.

“How did you know that?” Twilight asked, always astounded at the information Pinkie had.

“Spike told me!” She replied happily.

The sound of horns broke through the sky. All the gathered ponies turned toward the sound and saw six golden chariots descending on Ponyville. Each one was pulled by two stoic pegasus ponies of the royal guard. The crowd parted to create a landing strip and the chariots lined up side by side, their open ends facing the crowd. The guards said nothing.

Twilight Sparkle had enough experience with the royal chariot service to know they were simply expected to get on and let the pegasus ponies do their jobs. She still wasn’t sure where the others were, the tickets had said to be ready for pickup by eight so they could be on time for the Gala’s opening ceremonies at ten. Canterlot was almost an hour away by chariot and they didn’t want to take even the slightest chance at being late.

While Twilight was worrying about her not-yet-present friends, Pinkie hopped gaily into one of the chariots, beckoning her date over to stand by her side. Their approach and excited waiting almost made the whole scene feel like a regal procession. This feeling was reinforced by Fluttershy and Angel next taking dignified steps into their own chariot with Fluttershy being extra careful not to soil her dress. Spike, realizing this one would be the least crowded, decided to accompany the two for the duration of the trip. Twilight, not wanting to break the mood, walked in a similar manner into her own chariot, Trixie stopping similarly by her side.

Rainbow Dash, not being one for fancy parades, flew quickly into her own chariot and said loudly, “Where are those slow pokes?”

Seemingly in answer to her question, the door to Carousel Boutique flew open, sending oos and aahs up from the crowd. In the doorway stood a very uncomfortable looking grey pegasus pony. She was dressed in Rarity’s newest creation: a gown that looked like something a princess would wear. Its base color was a gentle light blue, with pink fringes. Arranged in order near the edges of the dress were pink hearts, representing a mother’s love. The front hooves had bows a slightly deeper shade of pink than the fringes, with a blue cone hat with short pink ribbons.

The mare made her way awkwardly down the steps and into the street. She went through the crowd which parted way for her all along the path to her chariot. Following her was a small unicorn filly. The filly was in a more modest dress. It was white with a pink band near the end and running up the back to the collar. On the back of her color was placed a large pink bow with a blue gem in the center. A similar bow was arranged around her horn, with smaller bows on each hoof. The filly pranced happily just behind her mother, the two of them stopping on the floor of their designated chariot.

Rarity appeared after them, dressed in her own Gala specific dress. The deep pink dress with yellow streaks, topped off with a golden tiara was very precious to her. It was made by her friends when she was in a horribly depressed mood. The dress embodied their feelings toward her, and she was always careful to treasure it. She stepped daintily into the chariot already occupied by Rainbow Dash, realizing that Applejack had yet to make her appearance.

The ponies stood in their respective rides for a few minutes, becoming more and more apprehensive about leaving. The guards were getting nervous too. It was their responsibility to get everyone to the Gala on time, and waiting too long here would force them to fail that task. Dash was just about to suggest they leave without AJ when a shout rang out above the crowd. "WAIT!"

They turned toward the noise and saw Applejack. Her mane and tail were braided neatly. She was, as the others, wearing the dress Rarity had made for the occasion. Hers was a smooth brown saddle with green side drapes, her own leather hat, and green cowgirl boots. The unexpected part of her getup was the wagon full of apples she was pulling. Right behind her was her brother, Big Macintosh. He was dressed in a fetching black suit with pinstripes. He wore a red undershirt and a long black tie. He had two carts in a neat line attached to his pulling collar, which itself clashed with his suit. His carts were filled with apple pies, strudels, and other apple-based treats.

The guard pony's eyes filled with fear when they realized what the Apple siblings expected. The other ponies quickly tried to think of a way to accommodate this new burden. Twilight spoke up first: "Alright, here's how we can get this to work. Angel, Spike, you ride with us. Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash will have to fly themselves to the Gala. Two carts can just barely fit in one chariot, and the other rides with Rarity."

"Oh, I'm not sure I can make it all that way..." Fluttershy said softly. "Maybe I could fit in with somepony else?"

"These could start getting awful tight." Trixie remarked, already disappointed that she'd have two interlopers in her chariot with Twilight.

"Well, I can't ask Der...er...Dinky can't go without her mother, and there's no other flyer here..."

"She can ride with us, right mommy?" Dinky called out.

"That would be fine, I think." Derpy replied.

"Oh thank you, Ms. Doo." Fluttershy said, squeezing into their chariot.

'Oh, of course!' Twilight thought to herself, wanting to smack her head with her hoof. 'Ms. Doo. Ditzzy Doo. How could I have forgotten for so long?'

It took some arranging, and some shoving to get everyone ready to fly, but eventually they were ready. The carts were set, the ponies were ready, and Rainbow Dash was hovering over the whole crowd. The guards looked straight ahead, waiting for the signal. The de facto leader of their group nodded his head and grunted as he and his partner started running along the ground. They flapped their wings mightily and were soon airborne. The entire fleet followed, leaving behind a crowd of ponies murmuring and talking about what they saw that morning. They discussed how fabulous the dresses those who left had worn,

how strange it was to see Ditzzy and Dinky among that otherwise highly distinguished and well-known group. They talked about Rarity and Rainbow Dash not having dates, Applejack apparently dating her brother, and Trixie's reappearance, with Twilight Sparkle no less.

The conversations continued until the fleet of chariots was well out of sight and on their way to The Grand Galloping Gala: most spectacular of parties in all of Equestria.