

The Hound of Ponyville p5: Worst Day Ever

By Thanqol

We planned well into the night. Our objective was to humiliate Prince Blueblood in front of Rarity and drive her away from him, but some of our schemes and ideas passed well into the range of cartoonishly absurd. Eventually, we settled on three core ideas that, in sequence, would achieve our ends perfectly. We practiced, rehearsed and plotted contingencies. It was oddly fun - Spike may have been a villain of the first order, but he understood the ways of pranks better than anypony I had previously encountered. Some of his ideas however, like tearing up a toy mouse and blaming it on the Prince, were just stupid. Mine were much better.

The next morning we were hiding in the bushes outside the main gate, taking turns to look through Spike's binoculars. We spied Rarity's carriage coming from some way off, and I observed the Prince, Pinkamina and Mrs. Pie to emerge to meet them. I could spot neither Trixie nor Mr. Pie anywhere. Just as well - Trixie was the biggest threat to this joint operation, and having her out of the picture made things a lot easier.

"Lady Dash," Spike said, twirling his greasy black moustache, "You may begin phase one."

I took the container of prepared sneezing powder, flew into the sky and snagged a convenient cloud, and flew it low over the entrance hall of Ponyville Manor. From this cover, I had an excellent vantage point from which to view the proceedings. The Prince was looking bored, Pinkie was looking furious, and Rarity, just coming out of the carriage, was looking absolutely *radiant*...

I pray my readers will forgive me a brief lapse into fangirlism, but Rarity simply stole my breath away in that moment. She wore a red and crystal dress which seemed to be the ultimate manifestation of her craft. It was elegant while being complex; eye-catching while being understated; an expression of individuality and spirit while concealing and enchanting. My breath stopped, and for a moment I forgot my mission.

And then she smiled - smiled at Blueblood - and I remembered. My task here was to save her from him. And so, I upended my bag of sneezing powder over the Prince and took cover behind the cloud. No doubt his churlish nature would show through in the event of a sneezing fit, or so the plan went. And no doubt Rarity would be enraged if he sneezed on her dress.

"Hello," said Rarity with a coy smile, "I don't believe we have been introduced."

"Indeed," said the Prince, raising one eyebrow in a charming and flirtatious way, "I am Prince Blueblood, and it is simply - aah! AAH!" The Prince sneezed suddenly and dramatically. I grinned and winked at Spike.

"Oh! Poor dear!" Rarity said, and grabbed the cloak off her back and offered it to the Prince. He grabbed it with both hooves and sneezed spectacularly into it. When he looked up, his expression was vaguely sheepish.

"Quickly, we must get you some fresh air!" Rarity said, urging the Prince away from the door and starting to walk very close by his side.

Spike and I stared at each other in shock. The plan had succeeded perfectly and yet failed spectacularly. In retrospect we should have adjusted for Rarity's natural generosity of spirit. All was not lost, though; this just meant that we had to be doubly successful with our next attempt.

We crept around the house and found a spot in the bushes along the path where Rarity and Blueblood were walking. Prince Blueblood paused by a rose bush to take a sniff of a beautiful, red rose in full bloom.

"Oh, what an enchanting rose!" said Rarity. Spike brushed the rose bush forwards so the thorns caught on the Prince's shirt collar.

"You mean... *this* rose?" the Prince said, standing up with the rose in his mouth. The wind caught his hair and the light caught his teeth. It was a truly spectacular motion - that was some weapons grade seduction, right there.

And there was a loud ripping sound as he tore his collar clean off on the rose bush.

Spike and I grinned and exchanged a brohoof.

The Prince dropped the rose, gasping in horror. Rarity's eyes widened, and she stepped forwards, horn glowing. She levitated the rose and the remains of the collar, and focused. With a rapid series of delicate movements she somehow stitched the two together around the Prince's neck, using the rose's stem as a thread to hold the collar together.

"... thank you," said the Prince in surprise.

"It goes with your eyes," Rarity said, batting her eyelashes.

Spike and I exchanged another grim look. How were we succeeding so completely and yet failing so utterly? We had one trick left up our sleeves, though. We set about infiltrating Ponyville Hall's upper levels in preparation for our next and final prank. There was heavy lifting involved, and I would like it recorded Spike was no help at all with it.

I glanced out of the second story window. Rarity and the Prince were standing still in front of the closed door into Ponyville Hall. I could tell immediately what was happening - the two were waiting for the other to open the door. Which meant they'd be there for a while. Perfect.

I stepped back into the room and gave the grand piano we'd aimed out the window a severe kick. There was a gasp and the sound of splintering wood and discordant music as it landed on Prince Blueblood's head - a direct hit. Spike and I both wore expressions of victory, briefly celebrating before we heard Rarity's voice from below crying, "Oh, you poor dear! Let's get you inside!"

Spike and I stopped celebrating immediately.

"How was *that* supposed to drive them apart!?" I shouted at Spike.

"I don't know, it was your idea!" Spike retorted.

"No, I just asked if we could find a piano. You were the one who suggested dropping it on his head!"

"Why would you ask for a piano if you weren't thinking of dropping it on his head!?"

"I don't know!"

At that exact moment, Trixie burst into the room we were talking in. She strode in proudly, brandishing a piece of paper in her magical grip, "Rainbow Dash! The Great and Powerful Trixie has discovered the true identity of the escaped criminal on the moor!"

"I know," I said, looking out the window with the binoculars. "It's Spike."

"Exactly! It's Scootal -" Trixie stopped in mid sentence, looking from me to Spike, and her expression fell from triumph to embarrassment to anger. She scrunched up the paper she was carrying and threw it into the corner. "Alright then. Spike. Where's the Hound?"

"Hound?" Spike said, and Trixie picked him up by the tail with her magic and shook him vigorously. His hat, his small change, and a locket with a picture of Rarity clattered to the floor.

I hesitated for a moment while I figured out what Trixie was talking about, and then realized that in my desire to deal with Blueblood I'd completely forgotten to ask Spike about the Hound. I facehoofed briefly at my own idiocy, but decided to play along as to not embarrass myself in front of Trixie by confessing my collaboration with him. "Yeah! The Hound!"

"Why do you want to know about the Hound? That thing is scary!" Spike said. Trixie shook him again. "Okay, okay! I'll tell you! Just put me down!"

Trixie cast him into a corner, and the two of us loomed over him.

"When I got away from Bridle Shores, I was looking for somewhere to sleep, and I found this cave, right?" Spike babbled, spilling his guts so readily I felt embarrassed for him, "On the border of the moor? Seemed pretty legit, so I was going to go in - and then this huge monster comes out!"

"What did it look like?"

"Big. Purple and black. Covered in stars, bunch of stars on its head. Ginormous teeth!" Spike said. Trixie and I exchanged glances.

"Did you see any ponies?" I pressed.

"Ponies?"

"Fluttershy!"

"Oh, yeah. She was in a cage or something. I wasn't really paying attention."

Fluttershy was alive - and she was being kept by the Hound! Without waiting for further confirmation, I jumped out the open window and started to fly. I heard Trixie shout, "Rainbow, wait!" from behind me but I wasn't going to slow down and deal with this rationally. I swept over the moors, searching for the cave Spike had described.

I swiftly found it. It was a dark and ominous construction, large enough for an Ursa Minor to enter, with all too familiar claw marks all around the entrance. There was a strangely oceanic smell to the place, the tang of sea salt and trace amounts of white sand around the entrance. I pressed on into the cave without hesitation, calling Fluttershy's name.

And I found her.

The interior of the cave was not what I had been expecting. It was oddly... homey. Everything was designed for something much larger than a pony but seemed otherwise normal. There were outsized armchairs, a fireplace, a kitchen counter, and other amenities that one would expect in a modern house. Here and there were piles of brightly coloured spherical shapes - seeming to me like skull piles in the flickering darkness - and there, was what looked to be a sound stage with various instruments piled up. There were lines of portraits on the walls, though I couldn't make out the figures in the gloom.

And hanging from the ceiling, low to the ground, were a number of bird cages. Two of them were occupied - and one of those was Fluttershy! The other held a pegasus I did not know, and was trussed with rope besides.

And in front of her, sitting before an easel, was Mr. Pie. He had before him the painting that had

been on the wall of Ponyville Hall, and was delicately colouring it in. Fluttershy was slumped in her cage. She had that defeated, sad, weeping look in her eyes that Mr. Pie had captured in his painting.

"Ah, Lady Rainbow Dash. So glad you could join us," said Sedimentary Elbert Pie, putting his brush down and turning to face me.

"Mr. Pie! You're the one behind this?" I cried, and he nodded in an uninterested, sedate way.

"Now, easy there, Lady. You're obviously thinkin' that this isn't what it is."

"You kidnapped Fluttershy! What else could it possibly be?" I cried.

"This ain't nothing but a family thing," said Mr. Pie calmly.

"Fluttershy isn't your family!"

"Yep. But Pinkamina is," and for a moment, I saw real anger in Mr. Pie's eyes. He spat contemptuously on the ground. "An' this here hussy came along and starts distracting our Pinkamina. I done *seen* what they got up to. Distracting each other! So I decided to, well, remove the sun so to speak. You know that if all you can see is the goal you can't go wrong? I'm just helpin' my daughter focus on what's important."

"What could be so important that's worth kidnapping somepony for!"

"Rocks."

He was dead serious as he said it.

"Rocks? Really?" I said, mouth dry upon the realisation I was in the presence of legitimate crazy.

"Rocks ain't gonna grow themselves."

"Right. This is the part where I kick you into unconsciousness." I said, resolving myself and starting forwards.

"Now, now, Lady Dash. Harry here might have somethin' to say about that."

And something huge loomed out of the darkness. The Hound of Ponyville. My jaw dropped.

It wasn't a hound.

It was a **bear**.

A big, brown, furry, grizzly bear.

And it was wearing a dress. A dress I knew all too well.

It was purple. It was black. It had constellations on it. It had a line of four stars on a headband. And it had teal bows and highlights. I remembered the teal and starred butterfly I'd picked out of the swamp. This was Twilight's dress, the horrible one that Rarity had made. The one she'd thrown away.

Somepony must have gone dumpster diving.

I was so stunned by the sight that my dodge was off, and I was grabbed and stuffed into the cage next to Fluttershy. The cage door was slammed shut.

"An' now I've got draw *another* picture." said Mr. Pie, sounding wearied by the prospect. "Not to mention if our friend here told anypony else where to find your house, Harry. C'mon, let's go to Ponyville Manor an' sort this all out."

The bear nodded, and the two of them walked towards the entrance of the cave. As they went, the bear picked up one of the instruments from the sound stage. It was a sea shell, a huge sea shell. The bear blew into it, and played the sound of a great hellhound howling. He brushed one of the sphere piles and picked up a big beach volleyball, tucking it under his arm as the two of them left.

They slammed and locked the heavy wooden door behind them, and I heard the sound of a bolt being thrown.

My eyes adjusted soon to the gloom.

"Um. Thanks for the rescue, Rainbow Dash," said Fluttershy.

This was the worst day ever.