

Dispatches from Ponyville: Single Action Colt
Part I: Miss Dish Goes to Ponyville

“Thank you so much, Miss Rarity!” The turquoise unicorn beamed as the door to Carousel Boutique opened out onto a bright, warm day. “I’m very excited about this arrangement.”

Her elegant companion smiled warmly. “Please, darling. For the last time, it’s simply ‘Rarity!’ And please stop thanking me! It makes me absolutely *giddy* that you’ve let me in on this little soiree you’re planning! Not only that, but modeling my new line of heels for your column? How could I have possibly said no?”

Celebrity Dish, premiere gossip and trends columnist for the *Trotter*, looked down and admired once again the sparkling crystal shoes that adorned her hooves. They had been a very unexpected addition to all the scheming she’d done today, but once they had come up, there was no way she was going to let the designer say no, either.

“I was hoping you’d go into hoofwear ever since I saw you at the Grand Galloping Gala,” Celebrity said. “I was just so instantly transfixed by these the moment I saw them, I barely even noticed you were splattering frosting on the crown prince like a mad do--”

She was cut off by a noise that started as a demure laugh but took a sharp turn into a piercing screech. Birds ceased their chirping and the clouds over the boutique halted their drifting as the pegasi steering them nervously peeked down.

“Haha!” Rarity said with a dismissive hoofwave and a barely perceptible twitch in her eye. “There’s really no need to go into *that* now! If ever!” Celebrity smiled and nodded silently. Experience had taught her better than to ruffle up the artistic types. “Now,” Rarity continued, “heels are fragile things and can take some time to become accustomed to. If you do feel like you are going to fall over--”

“Spring with the legs of your most stable side, barrel roll, take the brunt of your landing with your back and tuck your hooves in to prevent scuffing,” Celebrity recited.

Rarity gasped in delight, a smile spreading wide across her face. “Fashion Preservation Protocol Number 10! You *are* the perfect choice for this! Oh! but I mustn’t be keeping you. You have to find your colleague if we are going to make all of this work! Now what day is it...?” The unicorn rolled her eyes upward in thought. “...Ah, you may be in luck! I often see him outside the bowling alley about this time each week! I don’t go there myself, of course--such a dreadfully tacky place--but now that I think about it, I’ve never seen him actually walk inside, either. How odd... Oh well! You should start your search there and I shall finish preparations here. Best of luck. See you soon!”

Celebrity thanked the unicorn again and turned down the lane, her new heels making a rhythmic

tik tik tik tik as she trotted toward the center of the village. They shone and sparkled and gave her a graceful posture, yes, but her favorite thing about them was how they reminded her of the chief stomping around her office. Hopefully they'd trigger the same response in Presspass, and with what she was going to ask him, she'd likely need any psychological advantage she could get.

She felt the eyes of the bustling ponies around her--looking up in a friendly greeting, then lingering down for a few amazed seconds on her hooves--and couldn't help but give an appreciative smile. For all Presspass had always babbled on about how crazy it was in this town, it at least felt like a genuine place, and moving down here had brought out a certain *je ne sais quoi* in her coworker's writing. Something about it felt more vivid and alive than when he had been milling about her highbrow territory in Canterlot; and if he belonged better down here, then all the better for him. Sure, the first couple weeks he was gone, she would raise her eyes with some new quip or dig about him only to look downcast at the empty desk in front of her. But then she hung a mirror there, which helped.

So really, Celebrity thought to herself, if Presspass is fitting in in Ponyville, her assignment down here could only help him out. He could end up being even happier than he is now!

"GRRAWRGHGH!" Presspass growled, the small creature between his teeth flailing as he whipped it around by the scruff of its neck. The burgundy earth pony flung his victim up with a snort and met it in mid-air with a fierce headbutt, sending it flying ragdoll-like into a pile of garbage bags.

He spat out stray bits of white fur, then gave a menacing chuckle as he stalked deeper into the back alley.

"Thought you could pull that one over on me again, huh?" he sneered. "But observing is what I do, fuzzball! Now you'll see what happens when you don't switch up your ga--"

The pony froze in mid-sentence as a high-pitched shriek resounded down the alley, causing his mane to stand on end. He spun around to find a wholly unexpected yet familiar unicorn, eyes wide with terror.

"Cel???" he choked. "What are you doing here?!"

"Presspass!" she squeaked. "C-calm down, now. Let's talk about this!" She held up a trembling hoof. "I know you have issues with them, and I... I'm sorry I never took them seriously, but for Celestia's sake, don't kill that poor, defenseless bunny!"

"What???" Presspass recoiled in shock. "No! This is way, way not what it looks like! And trust me,

that bunny is *not* defenseless--” A rustle from the pile behind him stopped him again as he nervously turned back. “Uh oh...”

Trash exploded in all directions as a fluffy white ball of rage careened toward the earth pony. He had no time to take a defensive stance before a large foot connected with his throat, the other swinging up in a flipkick squarely beneath his chin. As the pony wheezed and staggered back onto his haunches, the rabbit landed on the ground, rebounded off the near wall and put the full force of its body into smashing the reporter against the side of his face. He fell over, dazed, as Celebrity screamed again.

“Agh-kk!” Presspass frantically waved his front hooves in submission as the rabbit leaped for his throat again. “I give! I GIVE!” He panted, relieved, as the creature cut its attack short, landing smugly on the pony’s chest. “Sheesh, Angel, you big cheater. Way to take advantage of company showing up.”

The bunny wagged his paw at Press’s face and chittered derisively.

“Oh, right,” the pony conceded. “You do get a free one for that time I surprise attacked you from off Twilight Sparkle’s balcony. But we’re totally even now, right?” Angel’s ears wobbled as he nodded in agreement.

“Uh, excuse me,” Celebrity chimed in, carefully making her way through the scattered litter. “I don’t mean to interrupt what looks like a sweet bonding moment, but will you please tell me why I just found you fighting a bunny behind a bowling alley?!”

“Well, Cel,” Presspass said sheepishly as the victor let him up. “It’s kind of a long story...”

“Just give me the brief, reporter boy,” Celebrity huffed back.

“Sure.” Press shook himself off and pointed a hoof toward the rabbit. “This is Angel. He’s my group therapy partner.”

Silence crept upon the alley as Celebrity waited expectantly, then rolled her eyes. “All right, I bite. A little more to go on, please.”

Presspass walked over to his fedora and saddle bags, placed neatly off to the side. “After that whole, er, episode at Sugarcube Corner--the one with the carrot cake and the explosion--Fluttershy--”

Celebrity gasped. “Fluttershy, the former model?”

“Whaf?” Presspass flipped his hat from his mouth up onto his head. “Nah. She’s sweet, but there’s no way she could’ve been a model. Anyway, she discovered my phobia and thought it

would help if I had some sessions with her and her pet rabbit here, Angel.” The pony lowered his voice delicately. “He has a few anger management issues.”

Angel folded his paws across his chest and gave a small snort.

“But there was just one problem,” Presspass continued.

“You’re too far gone to help?” Celebrity ventured.

“Nope. Fluttershy’s a terrible therapist! I mean Celestia bless her, she tries, but you can’t make any breakthroughs if you’re too afraid to disagree with anything we say!”

“Why didn’t you just call me?” Celebrity asked. “I’m great at that!”

“I know, right?” Presspass replied. “It’s awful, but you just can’t get mad at somepony like her, so we always leave her cottage ready to boil over. Then one day we were especially steamed and Fluffbutt suddenly puts up his dukes. I was all, ‘No way! I don’t have a reason to beat on you!’ So he roundhouse kicked me in the face and stole my hat and then I was like, ‘Oh. IT. IS. GOING TO HAPPEN RIGHT NOW!’”

“So you fought.” Celebrity tilted her head quizzically. “And this made things better, somehow?”

“It was so cathartic!” Presspass bounced up on his hind legs and punched out with his front hooves. “We went for each other’s throats for like half an hour! And as we were lying on the ground bruised and wheezing, that’s when we realized: This is healing! Angel can finally vent away from Fluttershy, and I have built my confidence in holding my own against spontaneous rabbit attacks!” Presspass beamed with specific pride at the last part. Angel just looked at the unicorn and shrugged.

“So we still go to the sessions,” Presspass continued, “and we just smile and nod. Fluttershy is seeing such great progress in us, you know.” He grinned slyly. “Then we come here and smack the alfalfa out of each other! We call it ‘The Flutterfight Response!’”

Angel rolled his eyes and booted the maroon pony in the shin.

“Ow! OK, OK. *I* call it ‘The Flutterfight Response.’” His explanation fully stated, he smiled broadly at the unicorn, who stared blankly back.

“...I’m going to pretend I didn’t hear any of this,” she finally sighed, turning around and navigating back through the minefield of trash. “You two finish up your dumb macho escapades and I’ll see you out front.”

Once Presspass emerged from the alley--and following a sniff test from an insistent Celebrity--the two newsponies began a meandering stroll through the village. If they had been any other pair, they might've taken the chance to "catch up on old times," but when most of your remaining "old times" are now lining chicken coops or have been folded into makeshift sailboats, they don't seem to have as much relevance. Instead, Presspass made increasingly distracted glances downward.

"Nice shoes," he finally said. "They make you sound like Etta."

"Oh?" Celebrity batted her lashes in innocent surprise. "I hadn't noticed!"

"Sure..." Presspass arched a suspicious eyebrow, but suddenly recalled a more pressing concern. "Oh, hey! Speaking of Etta, has she changed her mind about--"

"No, Press," Celebrity rolled her eyes. "She's never going to give you those vacation days back for that whole Discord thing."

"Aw, come on!" the earth pony protested. "I keep telling you, I was writing my flank off when all that weird stuff was going down all around me. Honest. But then the words started swirling together and that *thing* just popped out my notebook and gave me the freaky eye!" He leaned in and bugged his eyes out at the unicorn, who warily craned her neck backward. "Things are kind of hazy after that, but I was working and that's the important part!"

Celebrity gave a small sigh and lifted a curled sheet of paper out of her petite saddlebag. "We believe you up to that point, but then you... Look, I was told never to show it to you, but if it'll get you to stop pestering me to talk to the chief every chance you get...!"

She clenched her teeth as the sheet magically unfurled itself in front of Presspass's face. He recognized his own mouthwriting, if not a little jittery:

Dear news:

How are you? I am great. I ate tons and tons of cotton candy clouds today and urped in Carrot Top's upside-down floating garden. Please write back soon!

*Love,
Press*

P.S. Nothing to report today but I have an interview with a ladybug at 5! /)^3^(

The unicorn watched her colleague's face run the gamut from confusion to disbelief. When it jumped to unbridled horror, she knew to put the paper away.

“See?” she said simply.

Presspass gave one last defiant huff, then let his ears droop as he looked down in shame.

“Carrot Top did say her harvest tasted especially sweet this year...” he muttered.

Celebrity gagged. “Blagh! Can we just drop this whole thing now? Please?!”

“Yes, yes! I’ll drop it, trust me.” He sighed at Celebrity, then suddenly narrowed his eyes. “Wait,” he snorted. “How many copies did you make?”

“Oho!” Celebrity’s eyes sparkled. “I--er...” As much as she wanted to tease him with the stack of *Discorded Dispatch* she left next to the water cooler, she realized it would be detrimental to her mission. “I didn’t come down to rub this stuff in your face, you know. What I need is someone with, um...” She floundered for a second, then waved a glistening hoof. “With your expert knowledge of Ponyville and its residents!”

“Really?” The earth pony’s countenance brightened as he stood tall. “Well you’ve come to the right pony, of course! I’ve slipped into the culture here like a greased pumpkin through a mail chute!”

“Pardon?” Celebrity arched an eyebrow.

“Just something I heard an old pony say in the market once.” Presspass grinned. “And that’s why I’m the pro! I’ve already found all the secrets about this place, including...” He glanced around to ensure their privacy, then leaned in close. “The Background Society.”

“Background... Society?” Celebrity blinked. “That sounds kind of oxymoronic.”

“A high-falutin’ hob-knobber like you would think that, but I’m telling you they have some sort of all-seeing eye over this city.” He jerked his head to the right. “A lot of them are over there right now!”

Celebrity glanced over. “You mean that group of everyday ponies by the cafe that are chatting in pairs, milling by and otherwise not doing anything out of the ordinary with their lives at all?”

“Not so loud!” Presspass put a hoof up to the unimpressed unicorn’s mouth. “They look perfectly normal, but I’m telling you: follow them around for a day and if something big happens? Boom! It’ll be right where they are! Parasprite swarms! Dragon attacks! Spontaneous production numbers! It’s as though they’re being guided by some invisible hoof to each scene...”

“Okay, then... Well...” Celebrity looked awkwardly around, trying to come up with a decent

response to his lunacy, but all she could think to herself was, *Why aren't you used to this by now?*

"Back to topic," she finally said, giving up. "Etta's been very happy with the increased Ponyville attention you've been digging up; so much so that she wants me to pitch in with my section and provide some gossip from down here. It's a fine idea, I guess, but..."

"But no one around here is ever found face-down drunk in a ruby-encrusted trough of dandelion wine, right?" Presspass smirked, receiving an annoyed glare in response.

"There are much more graceful ways of putting that," Celebrity huffed, "but let's just go with it for your simplicity's sake. So then I thought, if I couldn't find any entertaining gossip, why not *make* some entertaining gossip?"

"Well *that* sounds like a potentially disastrous thing to s--"

"Shut up. So what does every pony love to see? A budding, homespun romance, of course! That is why, through the blessing of our editor-in-chief and the help of the most-fabulously-out-of-place-in-these-parts Rarity, I have arranged for a 'speed dating' event at Carousel Boutique! Ponyville's most eligible bachelorettes will line up for four dashing gentlecolts and at the end, they will get to decide who to whisk away to a lavish dinner date in Canterlot! And I--if I'm lucky, and let's face it, I usually am--will get plenty to write about in the process. Grand thinking, no?"

Celebrity beamed at her colleague, awaiting his response. He raised his eyebrows and thought for a second.

"Eh. Doesn't sound too bad, Cel. It should get the job done," he said. "Just hope you didn't name it something dopey like all your other pet projects."

The unicorn's mane would have bristled were it not cemented in place with a variety of chemical products.

"Dopey!?" she sputtered. "My names are not dopey! They are thoughtful and engagingly clever!"

"It's something like 'Lovey-Go-Round,' isn't it."

The unicorn's eyes grew wide. "No!?! No. I mean no! Of course not, haha! 'Lovey-Go-Round'? That is just completely dopey! The dopest--no! I mean come on. So dopey!" She gave a flippant laugh that died out as she chewed on her lower lip. "You really think it's dopey...?"

Presspass did his best to stifle his own laughter, the effort being far from good enough.

"Pffthaha! Go on, forget it. It is what it is." He gave a bemused sigh. "So you want me to help

point out who's who in this little romantic-ish interlude, right? No problem. Should be fun watching those poor saps have to deal with all those dames."

"Ohhhh, not quite," Celebrity said with a wispy, high-pitched titter. "You see, one of the colts I arranged for this--some Whooves fellow--has just up and vanished on me. So I don't exactly need you as a resource as much as I need you for your, well... sappiness?"

She looked up sweetly at the sap in question, whose mouth dropped open.

"Wait. You want me to--and have--for--" The newspony's pupil's dilated. "Oh, no. No-no-no-no!"

The response wasn't unexpected for Celebrity. In fact, after all the stuff with rabbit boxing and unsettling showings of confidence, she felt they had finally returned to familiar territory.

"Oh, come on, Press," Celebrity cooed. "This could be your big chance to find that one special filly!"

"Under *your* watch?" the earth pony balked. "No way! This is Ponyville, Cel! Not one of your little Canterlotian garden parties. I've gotten good at handling the crazybombs that are part of life here, but throw in a crowd of love-addled fillies and you've got a Grade A Nuclear Wackhead in the making! Besides, I... I'm not looking for a fillyfriend right now! So having me there would just be unfair."

He stood defiantly against the unicorn--or so it would have seemed if she wasn't madly giggling.

"You? Not looking?!" she giggled to the point of snorting, shamefully throwing a hoof over her mouth. "You are so totally lying!" she hissed. "You should know better than to try to pull this sort of thing over on me!"

"Oh, geez," Presspass rolled his eyes. "You are not going to play 'Fashion Detective' again, are you?"

Celebrity regained her composure and cleared her throat. "First," she pointed a hoof at his, "the fetlocks you so obsessively kept neat and trim in Canterlot have grown wild and free, just the way most rural ladies prefer."

"Ha! That's not proof! I just haven't been to the barber in a--"

"Your mane is recently trimmed and impeccable!" Celebrity shot back, making the other pony set his jaw and glare. "Exhibit B," she continued. "Aside from the faint scents of rabbit and misplaced machismo I detected upon you outside the bowling alley, I also smelled a new cologne with hints of apple. Again, popular with the local female persuasion."

“You still have nothing,” Presspass said with a snort. “These... They’re just ways I fit in around here!”

“Oh?” Celebrity said with a devious grin. “Even if they are, how do you explain the fact that with every filly we’ve passed today, you’ve instinctively sucked in that small gut of yours you’ve developed? Which, I might add, you wouldn’t have if you hadn’t placed your home base so close to that sweet shop!”

“Gah!” Presspass recoiled! “Okay! Fine! Stop your freaky voodoo gossip magic, geez! So I’m still on the market somewhat, are you happy?” He sniffed indignantly. “And also, I blew up Sugarcube Corner’s kitchen, duh! I am trying to make it up to them with my patronage. It’s my little yoke to bear.”

“Yeah, you’re bearing it, all right!” Celebrity snickered, poking Press in his newfound pudge. “So it’s settled, then. Thank you so much for agreeing to this for me!”

“What the hay?!” Presspass grimaced. “I never said any such thing! You may have gotten away with goading me into things back in Canterlot, but maybe it’s time for you to learn the first lesson I received down here: You can’t always make things turn out the way you want them!”

“Oh, Press,” Celebrity giggled. “It was a very good lesson for you to learn, absolutely! But you must realize that only applies to certain ponies. A *lady* will always get what she wants.” She smiled primly, her eyes bright with just a hint of threatening flash. “I’m not going to leave you alone until you say ye-es~!” she sang.

“You’ve gotta be kidding,” Presspass sighed. “You used to pull this on me all the time too, but you know what?” He stomped a hoof, triggering the device that popped his notepad out of his saddlebag and in front of his face. “Oh no! Where did Celebrity go? I can’t see her anymore! Guess I don’t have to take part in her ridiculous and dopily named capers anymo--OW!!”

The unicorn had pulled down on the notepad and let it go, snapping it back into the reporter’s face. Once his eyes stopped rolling, he plainly saw her glaring at him, face scrunched in anger.

“I planned this for four colts,” she said through her teeth. “I promised four colts and I shall give them four colts.”

“Well, when you put it that way...” Presspass sat and gave a mock salute. “...Good luck finding a fourth!” He turned hooves on the fuming columnist and began trotting away. “Try your flirty face or your angry face as much as you want. They’re not working on this pony anymore!”

Presspass didn’t look back, even as a low growl crescendoed behind him. The sound of magic gave him a bit of pause, however, especially when he began to feel it tingle and spark around him. Every muscle in his body froze when he glanced back against his better judgment and

witnessed Celebrity poised as if to strike, horn and eyes blazing as surrounding ponies screamed and ran in all directions.

“Oh,” Presspass squeaked as a turquoise field of light surrounded him. “That must be your *really* angry face...”