The Hound of Ponyville p7: A Duel In Daylight

By Thanqol

We flew across the moors. As we reached the boundary of Ponyville Hall, I saw Trixie's dogs, hanging in mid-air above the wall, caught by the ward. They were barking and kicking their legs uselessly in the air, trying to reach the Manor, where the sounds of roaring and splintering wood was coming from.

We flew on, through the upstairs window of Ponyville hall, hitting the floor in a full gallop and rushing through to the great hall. The huge double doors were closed and barricaded – Trixie was standing in the centre of the hall, collecting tables, paintings, chairs and anything else she could gather with her magic and stacking it in front of the doors. Even so, in the hard wood there were rents where claws had done great damage. I could see Rarity – still in that marvellous crimson dress - and Blueblood standing on the stairs, Blueblood looking confident and unbothered, but subtly edging back behind Rarity. Of Spike, I saw no sign.

I rushed over to Rarity, who saw me, and then Fluttershy, with shock and then a curious sense of disappointment crossing her features. "Are you all right?" I asked at once, glancing between her and Blueblood.

"Rainbow ... " Rarity said slowly, "what possessed you to ally yourself with Spike?"

"I – what? How did you know that?" I gaped in dumb shock.

"I found the villain's binoculars. And I noted that one of them had a covering of black grease around one of the rims. And you, Rainbow Dash, have a completely blackened eye."

I raised my hoof to my face. Sure enough, some black grease came off. "Spike," I snarled with anger – of course he hadn't been able to resist pranking me, even when we were supposedly allied.

"If you don't mind," Trixie's voice called, slightly shrill as a claw splintered through the barricade, "I could use some help here!"

Knowing the situation had to be serious of Trixie had forgotten her usual mode of speech, I flew forwards into a guarding position above the door, moments before it crashed open and the huge bear, dressed in that awful purple gown, stomped into the hall. I hadn't had a chance to look at it

closely before, and doing so now was not an encouraging experience. It was three times as tall as a Pony when it was on all fours, and when it reared up it reached almost to the Hall's ceiling. It's fur was thick, brown, matted and poorly groomed. The hideous dress it wore was, however, in excellent repair, without the smallest scuff or loose thread.

I bucked it as hard as I could on the top of the head, and Trixie conjured a lightning bolt to strike it. Both attacks were utterly ineffective, and I had to dodge wildly to avoid being swatted by a flailing claw.

"Trixie!" I called, "Make a cloud!"

Trixie nodded and conjured a huge, dark stormcloud, which I spun around at maximum speed and then kicked directly into the bear's face. It exploded in a burst of electricity and the bear roared and actually stepped back, and for a moment I thought we had gained the upper hand. As was the way in these situations, though, immediately after thinking that I was caught by the bear's backhand and knocked into a pillar.

While waiting for my ears to stop ringing, I saw the bear advance on Trixie who was backing away hurriedly and fearfully. I got unsteadily to my feet when I heard a voice – Fluttershy's voice! – call something out. "Trixie, your dogs!"

Trixie suddenly smiled, and there was an almost imperceptible rush of air as she dispelled her own ward. The bear stopped as it heard the barking of dogs getting louder and turned around just in time to see the two orange and black dogs start to circle him. Trixie, grinning like a circus ringleader, tossed her hat directly at the bear. The bear raised one paw as if to block it, but one of the dogs jumped and caught it half way. The other dog jumped onto the bear's back and there was a ripping sound as it tore purple fabric.

There was a roar of absolute fury from the bear and it swung itself into a stone wall in an attempt to crush the dog, which jumped off at the last second. It surged forwards, and the dogs scattered, and Trixie screamed and bolted moments before she was crushed by an enormous claw. The bear chased after her and swept her up in its claws. I lunged in to save her but, in a movement that was *unfairly* fast for a monster that size, I was grabbed as well. It's grip was absolutely crushing, tighter than any pony would be able to escape from. The air was forced from my lungs as it squeezed.

"Do you have any idea what you've done?" Growled the bear, speaking for the first time. It's eyes were utterly enraged and in that moment I was convinced I was going to die. "That was an original design from the greatest mind in fashion, and you have ruined it!"

"I know, and Rainbow's behaviour is *quite* shocking," said Rarity, coming down the steps, gown trailing in her wake. The bear's grip slackened a little, and Trixie and I took deep gasps for breath.

The bear looked at her, and blinked. His eyes were wide and contemplative "Excuse me, ma'am," he said, in that deep, gravelly voice, "may I ask who your designer is?"

"Oh, this old thing?" Rarity said, turning to show off the full, graceful design of her perfect dress. "You like it?"

"Like it? I love it!" Snarled the bear. I was not familiar with conversations with bears, but he managed to make a compliment sound like a death threat. "Only three ponies in Equestria have that kind of talent."

"May I enquire as to who they are?"

"Why, Hoity Toity, Mr. Walker and Rarity, of course," snapped Harry the Bear.

"I see you have one of Miss Rarity's works already," Rarity commented, as calmly as if she was at a formal dinner reception.

"So it is Rarity's design! Oh! That is so inconvenient!" The bear cried, throwing his arms up in the air in exasperation and scrambling the minds of Trixie and myself in the process.

"Inconvenient? Inconvenient how?" Rarity said, surprised.

"Why, because if I crush you I shall damage the dress, likely beyond repair. And that would be a tragedy."

"A crime against fabulosity, you could say."

"Yes! Exactly!" Cried the bear, throwing up his arms again and making my eyes cross themselves.

"Well, we simply cannot have that," Rarity said, nodding firmly. "And so, I shall give you the dress now so you can go about your crushing with a clean conscience."

"You'd do that?" Harry's eyes seemed to light up like stars.

"Of course," said Rarity, horn glowing and undoing her dress. She removed it and set it down a safe distance away.

"You are, without a doubt, the most generous pony I've ever met," said Harry, raising the paw that was holding me up in preparation to swat Rarity. I tried biting his finger but just got a mouthful of fur for my trouble. Rarity looked up at certain demise without fear. "May I ask who I have had the honour of crushing?"

"You can call me Miss Rarity."

Harry stopped.

"THE Miss Rarity?"

"I would be quite disappointed if there was another." Rarity said calmly.

"What are you doing in a place like this?" Harry said, leaning down, eyes wide.

"Looking for inspiration. And I think I've found it," Rarity said, eyes gleaming, "Would you happen to know any bears who would be content to model for me?"

"Why, I would be delighted to!" Harry cried.

"Oh, but I see you have an existing commitment," Rarity said, gesturing to Trixie and myself. I wanted to hiss at her 'don't remind him!' but was too tightly gripped to get the words out.

"Bah!" said Harry, dropping Trixie and I to the ground where we both gasped for air, "I'm only here to pay off the loan I took out to buy this dress from Mr. Pie. And your offer is, frankly, better."

"You flatter me," Rarity said demurely. "Would you go and get ready? I need to get my materials,"

"Of course!" And the great bear turned and left the manor without another word, leaving only ruin in his wake.

"Rarity..." I gasped, getting to my feet.

"There is no time," she said, suddenly serious, "Mr. Pie took Pinkie out into the swamp, and we need to find her before the bear comes back. Trixie, you stay with the Prince. Rainbow, Fluttershy, we have to move.

"Okay," wheezed Trixie. Rarity galloped for the door and Fluttershy and I followed her as fast as we could.

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We reached the gate to the moors, where the fog had set in proper. There was no way to tell where Pinkie had gotten to from here, and the lanterns glowed red and bright. I opened my mouth to ask where we had to go now, but Rarity's horn was already glowing.

"I can feel Mr. Pie's pickax, it has some quartz stuck to it... this way!" She said, starting over the rock path.

We moved as fast as we could, but the path was treacherous and slippery. Rarity's horn almost pulled her along but more than once she had to skid to a halt and fight against it before it pulled her off the path and into the swamp. She lead the way as we hurried blindly through the mist, following the gleam of lantern-light and the white-purple glow of her horn.

In the mist, I heard voices. Pinkie's voice, and Mr. Pie's – as well as the voices of Pinkie's 'friends'. Ahead, coming out of the fog, we could see a large table, set for eight, with Pinkie sitting at one end, Mr. Pie sitting at the other, and a variety of inanimate objects occupying the remaining seats. Sir Lintsalot, Madame le'Flour, Mr. Turnip and Rocky – as well as Mr. Pie's pickax, sitting by Mr. Pie's right hand. There was one other figure I couldn't make out from where I was, and it didn't seem to be saying anything.

Fluttershy cried, "Pinkie!" and rushed forwards, and Rarity and I followed. I found myself pulled to a sudden halt – my feet were stuck in the mud! The path had, imperceptibly, vanished in front of us and we were all suddenly caught in quicksand! Of course – Mr. Pie had moved the lanterns, and we'd blundered right into his trap.

Pinkie Pie looked up. "Fluttershy?" she said.

Mr. Pie smiled calmly. "I didn't hear anything."

"But she's right there!" Pinkie said, eyes fixing entirely on Fluttershy, widening big and blue.

Mr. Pie leaned across the table, grabbed Mr. Turnip, and said, "Pinkie, your mind's playing tricks on you."

He slid across to Rocky. "And even if she was there, didn't she leave you without even a goodbye?"

"Well... yeah. I suppose she did." Pinkie said, a hint of steel creeping into her voice.

"Pinkie! It's me! I'm sorry!" Fluttershy called out, struggling against the quicksand but making no progress. In fact, her struggling was making her sink faster than either Rarity or myself.

"You know," said Mr. Pie, leaning across to shake Sir Lintasalot, "you should eat up your porridge. Keep up your strength."

"Long day of rock farming ahead of us," said Mr. Pie, shaking Rocky.

"Yeah, I suppose," Pinkie said, settling into her seat and taking a slow bite of her porridge. "I must be seeing things."

"That's my girl," said Mr. Pie, eyes unfocusing as he picked up his pickax and swung it around. With every other voice, he appeared completely sane and in control, but when he lifted that pickax I saw true madness.

"Yes. You're doing good," said Mr. Pie, rattling Mr. Turnip's can.

"We're proud of you, Pinkie," said Mr. Pie, lifting up Sir Lintsalot.

"Don't ever leave us again," said Mr. Pie, shaking Rocky.

"And what about you, Madame le'Flour? What do you think?" said Mr. Pie as himself

"Pinkie!" Cried Fluttershy, up to her neck.

"I think..." Pinkie said, slowly leaning over to the bag of flour. She put on Madame le'Flour's voice "What if Fluttershy didn't mean it?"

"What?" Said Mr. Pie as the lint.

"What?" Said Mr. Pie as the rocks.

"Beg pardon?" Said Mr. Pie as the turnips.

"Madame le'Flour..." Said Mr. Pie warningly, holding his pickax.

"I'm just saying that Fluttershy was a good friend, and if she is drowning in the swamp we should at least check..."

"Check? Check?" Mr. Pie said, voice raising, "CHECK? You're being DISTRACTED, Pinkie! Eyes on the PATH! If you look away, look to either side, even for a SECOND you'll be in the swamp!"

"Maybe she has a point?" Pinkie said as herself, weakly.

"A POINT? A POINT?" Mr. Pie said, snatching up his pickax and jumping onto the table. "I'LL SHOW YOU WHAT HAPPENS TO PONIES WHO DISTRACT. *MY*. DAUGHTERS!!!"

And he brought the pickax around in a huge, double-hoofed swing. It smashed into the bag of flour with terrible force, sending up a great puff of white. Mr. Pie swung, and swung, and swung again, each swing smashing into the bag of flour and sending up a cloud of white dust. He smashed it and smashed it in a frenzy, teeth gritted, eyes maddened, and then finally slowed and stopped, breathing heavily, covered head to toe in flour.

Madame le'Flour's destroyed corpse dropped slowly and dramatically to the ground.

There was a moment of absolute silence.

"You... killed her," said Mr. Turnip.

"She was our friend," said Rocky.

"You monster!" Cried Sir Lintsalot.

Pinkie Pie stood up on the table as well, looking her father in the eye, holding a glare of absolute fury. Her father swung the pickax guardingly between them, warding her off. "Pinkie! I did it for you. I don't want you to get hurt. I've got to remove the distractions. You *know* what happens when there are distractions," said Mr Pie.

Pinkie didn't move or blink, she didn't reach out and touch and shake the remaining objects, but

they began to talk anyway. In a different voice – a voice I gradually recognised, and when I did, my blood froze.

"He's just saying that," said Spike, as Rocky.

"He took Fluttershy away," said Spike, as Mr. Turnip.

"You need to stop him. You need to hurt him. For Madame le'Flour. For Fluttershy," said Spike as Sir Lintsalot.

Pinkie took a slow step forwards.

"Pinkie!" Cried Fluttershy, who was almost entirely under the quicksand.

"No! NO! STAY BACK!" Screamed Mr. Pie shrilly, swinging his pickax as he backed up.

"Pinkie!" Fluttershy called, barely keeping her mouth and nose above the quicksand.

Pinkie Pie took a step forwards.

"YOU CAN'T DO THIS!!" screamed Mr. Pie, swinging his pickax again. It passed inches from Pinkie's face but she didn't even blink.

"Do it," hissed Spike, standing on Pinkie's back, whispering directly into her ear. "Do it. For Fluttershy."

"I'm just trying to help you!" Mr. Pie almost sobbed, swinging another brutally powerful blow from his pickax inches away from Pinkie. "I'm just trying to keep you on the path!"

"Pinkie," Fluttershy gasped as the last of her nose disappeared under the quicksand.

Pinkie Pie took a step forwards.

And stopped.

Mr. Pie was balanced right on the edge of the table.

She blinked.

"Fluttershy?"

"No! Mr. Pie! You have to stop Mr. Pie!" hissed Spike, voice full of venom.

"No. Not dad," she said, reaching out and taking the pickax from Mr. Pie's trembling hooves, like taking a toy from a child. "It's you, Baron Pickax. It's always been you."

"No!" hissed Spike.

"Yes," said Pinkie calmly, and bucked Spike off her back casually. She stepped down off the table and started walking towards the swamp, "Dad was so afraid. So afraid. And he needed you to protect him. Like I needed my friends to protect me. But I... I remember now. Somepony once told me, right before I moved to Ponyville. That's not the way to deal with fears at all."

"It is! You deal with fears by defeating anyone who scares you!" Spike said, chasing after her, "There's only room for one at the top!"

"No," said Pinkie with a smile.

"There's room for two."

She slammed the pickax into the dirt of the shore, hard. And, smiling, she started wading into the quicksand. She held the pickax with one hoof and lowered her head into the quicksand.

And she came back out with Fluttershy in her hooves. Fluttershy was muddy, soaked, gasping for air and spitting up sand. Pinkie Pie slowly helped her out to the bank and the yellow Pegasus almost collapsed. Pinkie helped wipe the mud out of Fluttershy's eyes, and she looked up at the poofy haired pink pony. And there was a moment as they were there, in each other's arms, meeting each other's gaze, and the world seemed like it was full of colour again for the first time in a long time.

"So sorry to inter-uupt," Rarity said in a sing-song voice as the last of her neck vanished under the quicksand.

"So, Rarity, once again you find yourself in my power," Spike was saying, standing on the rocks over her and twirling his moustache, "I show mercy in victory, however, and am prepared to help you out in exchange for... well, what are you doing on Friday?"

"My hair." Said Rarity flatly.

"Saturday?"

"Rainbow's hair."

"Saturday evening?"

By this point, Pinkie Pie had made it over to where Spike and Rarity were, and Fluttershy was hovering above me and pulling me out. Spike grinned when he saw Pinkie Pie looming over him. "Oh, hey Pinkie Pie. No hard feelings, right?"

"Nope!" Pinkie said brightly, offering one hoof.

Spike took it, and was promptly electrocuted by the buzzer Pinkie wore. He collapsed in a blackened pile of smoke. Pinkie giggled, and leaned over the side to help Rarity up out of the mud.

"Just as well I gave my dress away," said Rarity. "Cleaning *that* off it would have been unendurable."

Pinkie laughed, and I did too. For a moment, all seemed right with the world.

"So what do we do about him?" said Fluttershy, looking over at Mr. Pie, who was shaking helplessly by the edge of the swamp. Pinkie smiled and walked over to him, helping him up and urging him along.

"We take care of him, silly. And we teach him how to laugh."

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We made our slow path back to Ponyville Hall. Fluttershy was helping along Mr. Pie with the kindness of a saint, and Pinkie was carrying the unconscious Spike. Rarity complained the entire way about the mud, extracting it piecemeal from her coat with her magic. By the time we arrived back at the front gate, she was almost clean, which – given who was waiting there for us – may have been a grave strategic blunder.

Because as soon as he saw Rarity, Prince Blueblood swept her off her hooves in a motion dramatic, romantic – and practised. He ignored everypony else, everything else, and said to the swooning Rarity, "You have saved my life, and my hall."

"Oh," breathed Rarity directly into that dazzling smile.

"Don't you see, Lady Rarity? The Fates intended it so. By all the stars in the sky, by the passage of the Sun and Moon, this was meant to be."

Oh no he didn't.

I stepped forwards and slapped him right across his smug face as hard as I could.

He dropped Rarity like a sack of potatoes, looked at me in shock, and then suddenly slapped me right back. I stepped back in shock – he hadn't pulled that at all, and my cheek stung.

"Knave!" cried Prince Blueblood, "What is the meaning of this!?"

"Keep your hooves off her, you two-faced slime!" I shouted, flaring my wings aggressively.

"You would come between true love?" the Prince said, stepping forwards. He was much bigger than me, but I didn't even blink in stepping up to him.

"You incomparable toad, you used the exact same line on me!"

"Jealousy," said the Prince smugly, "Jealousy because Rarity and I share something you will never possess."

I raised my hoof to punch him in the face, but the Prince snorted contemptuously. "If you insist on this arrogant idiocy, then at very least we shall settle this as a proper matter of honour. I accept your challenge of a duel, and I choose swords at sundown."

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"Why not right now?" I challenged, "Are you scared?"
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The Prince glared. "Immediately, then! Trixie! One's swords!"

Everypony else backed off as Trixie brought out a pair of swords in a large red box. I grabbed one in my mouth and floated up into the air. My blood was boiling, I was seeing red, and I wasn't thinking straight. I just wanted to wipe that smug smile off his face.

And then I saw Prince Blueblood levitate up his sword with his magic and spin it in a dramatic figure-of-eight movement, going through an enormously complex preparation kata. I was

holding my sword in my mouth and, if you've never had the privilege of doing so, this was a fairly ineffectual position. I could only perform one move: the clumsy horizontal slash. And I was going up against a unicorn who was evidently extremely skilled in fencing.

"First blood?" he asked calmly.

I suddenly realised that I was absolutely doomed and that I was absolutely going to lose.

"You bet."

I lunged forwards anyway.

Blueblood caught my predictable attack elegantly and twisted the sword around to flip me upside down and throw me back. I lunged right back to my feet and was on the assault again, lunging in with my one horizontal strike – and repulsed just as easily. He stood perfectly still, sword dancing around him like a dervish. It didn't take long to realise the Prince was playing with me. Of all the weapons in the world, swords were simply not meant to be wielded by those without either magic or opposable thumbs.

I tried using my superior speed, spinning around and attacking from angles or behind. The Prince didn't even move or turn around, sword spinning around behind him to deflect my attacks and knock me away. Again and again, I hurtled myself at an immovable object, and again and again I was defeated and repulsed with childish ease.

After dragging it out long enough to demonstrate his utter superiority, Prince Blueblood performed a dazzling attack against every side of me at once, a baffling array of strikes ending with the jabbing the hilt of his sword into my throat and causing me to gag and drop my own blade. He caught it in his own telekinesis and crossed it along with his other blade at my throat. A single drop of blood ran down my cheek and I knew that I'd lost. The Prince snorted, threw the blades aside, and turned around.

"My lady Rarity," said he, smiling and filled with pride, "One has brought you victory and defended your honour."

I lowered my eyes in defeat.

"And tell me, my Prince..." Rarity said, in that slow voice that meant she was thinking of something, "What has this victory cost you?"

"What do you mean?"

"I know what it cost Rainbow, because I know Rainbow. She hates losing, more than anything, and she just accepted an invitation to a fight she was absolutely certain to lose. That cost her a lot. You, on the other hoof, started a fight you were sure to win. That didn't cost you anything."

"But one proved one is the greater. And one shall prove one is greater than anypony in the entire world, for one *is*."

"You may be greater ... but she was prepared to give more than you were."

"One doesn't see what that has to do with anything!" The Prince said, "Anyway, one is prepared to prove himself. Ask! Set what challenge you want! Slay a dragon, storm a tower – one shall do it!"

Rarity reached down, gathered some mud, and smeared it on her face.

"Kiss me," she said.

"That's disgusting!" The Prince said, backing off.

"Afraid of a little mud?" she said with a smile. She turned to face me.

"Rainbow?"

I kissed her.

I understand that it is vulgar to kiss and tell, so I shall avoid going in to much more detail. Suffice to say that for once in my life I did not regret my impulsive decision.

"Well then," said Rarity, with a little less than her characteristic composure, "I believe that is decided."

"Decided?" said Blueblood furiously, snatching the sword up off the ground, "You would turn down a Prince? You would make an enemy of the most powerful stallion in Equestria? For a *pegasus*? One is still Lord of Ponyville Manor, and one won't forget this!"

"Why, you!" I said, starting forwards, but the sword was immediately at my throat.

"And what," he said with a wicked smirk, "do you think you can do about it, little soldier?"

"... I said, that isn't actually entirely correct." Came a voice from off to the side.

"Trixie, shut that pony up, I'm busy," snapped Blueblood. He was answered with a thunderclap, and he yelped and backpedalled rapidly from the lightning bolt that had struck the earth just in front of him.

"The GREAT and POWERFUL Trixie will have SILENCE while the Lady of Ponyville Manor speaks!" Shouted Trixie, and the skies above her rumbled. She gestured dramatically at Fluttershy, who cowered back a bit at suddenly being the centre of attention.

"Oh. Oh dear. Uh, what I was trying to say is that I'm actually kind of still the Lady of Ponyville Manor still." She pawed at the ground a little.

"Pah! No matter," Blueblood said, "Even without this place one can still see to it you *fillyfoolers* get what's coming to you!"

"What?" Fluttershy said, looking up sharply.

"One said," said Prince Blueblood, tossing his mane proudly, "That one is still a Prince, and will see to it that none of you *ever* work in this country again! Say goodbye to your careers, ladies! One would say it has been fun, but if it was we wouldn't be having this talk," And he turned on his heel to walk away.

And came eye-to-eye with Fluttershy.

"How dare you." She said. And there was something in that look that made Blueblood stop dead.

"I am the Lady of Ponyville Manor, and you are threatening *my* friends on *my* land. And I can put up with being kidnapped, locked in a cage and hunted by a giant scary bear - but you do not, I repeat **not**, HURT. MY. FRIENDS!"

And he fled. Prince Blueblood, the most proud and handsome and powerful unicorn in all the land, fled from that little yellow pegasus so fast he almost tripped over his own tail.

"So listen, my masters," said Trixie aloud, "and listen well,

"For I have a tale of wonders to tell.

"Of heroines and jerkwads and love and grace

"And the strangest monster to trouble this place."

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I feel compelled to apologise to my readers, whom I lured into this story with promises of a brilliant detective and a display of the science of deduction and the art of the dress, and instead provided with a tale of a bunglingly mishandled case and atypical romance. I am very sorry.

Harry the cross-dressing bear received a magnificent gown, as well as a tuxedo, designed and fitted especially for him from Rarity. When delivering it, I noticed to my eternal shame that the Pegasus who had been chained up in the cave with Fluttershy and myself was still there. We had quite forgotten about her in our rush to save Rarity, and the gag she wore had prevented her from raising her voice. I released her from her captivity but she seemed remarkably unbothered by the entire ordeal, claiming that she was used to it. I can't imagine what kind of lifestyle would involve getting used to being tied up and stuffed in cages and felt it would be impolite to ask. I am lead to believe she has since taken to writing a series starring Fluttershy and myself. I haven't read it, but when I asked Fluttershy about it she went a brighter shade of pink than Pinkie Pie.

Pinkie Pie, on that topic, made a full recovery, and Mr. Pie was given the psychological help he so dearly needed. Pinkie and Fluttershy opted, ultimately, to stay in Ponyville Hall together. I make it a point to visit often, for they have begun to bring real colour and life to that previously dismal place. The Great and Powerful Trixie, after umming and ah'ing for a theatrically long time, ultimately decided to stay as well. I wish the three of them happiness together.

And as for Rarity and myself, well. Suffice to say that you will be able to always find us, together, at number 221B Baker Street, ready to solve any crime great or small.

- RAINBOW MIRIAM DASH