

Bringing Up Blueblood

A "My Little Pony Friendship Is Magic" Fanfiction

-AND-

A Wholly Unnecessary Spinoff of "My Little Alicorn"

By InsertAuthorHere

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Chapter Seven

It was another morning of blood, sweat and tears for the Royal Guard, as well as Blueblood. By the time Shining Armor had put everypony through their morning paces, every inch of their bodies were drenched in all manner of foul-smelling liquids, from horse sweat to some sort of icky black tar in the case of Obstruction. The colt's entire body felt like a tinfoil figure slowly being crushed in a black hole.

Once again, a few new faces had joined the morning crew, prompting Shining Armor to repeat the same story as before. Once he was through how awesome it was to serve in the Royal Guard, he and the ponies in attendance shared a final salute before breaking away for their duties. This time, however, Blueblood knew better than to stick around longer than he had to, and quickly began galloping towards the nearest door back into the castle proper.

He was about five feet from his destination when he ran into a solid wall of flesh and metal. The impact sent the colt flying back on his rump, the straps of his costume coming undone on impact. As he rubbed his stinging snout and forehead, he just barely managed to make out a trio of guards, a Unicorn and two Pegasi, standing over him. Their eyes looked Blueblood over with a great degree of skepticism.

That would have been bad enough, but once Blueblood's vision completely returned, he was able to recognize the Unicorn.

It was the same pony that had awoken him that first morning. The one that had escorted him to Princess Celestia's room so she could begin his humiliation. The one he had offended in some way. And as far as he was concerned, he could have horribly wronged all three in some way. "C-Can I help you?"

The three looked amongst each other for a few moments, silently communicating some sort of message before turning back to the frightened colt. "Well, *Prince* Blueblood," said the Unicorn, "the guys and I have been talking, and..."

"We...think that Captain Armor is taking things a little bit too far," said the left Pegasus.

Blueblood slowly hoisted himself back to his hooves, grunting in pain with every move of his muscles, before turning his attention back to the guards. His mouth hung slightly in disbelief, his eyes widening. "What? B-But I thought the guard..."

"Hated you?" said the right Pegasus. His eyes narrowed as he bit on his lower lip. "Yeah, we still don't like you. You *did* call my wife a turnip farmer."

"And you *did* tell everypony I was a coltcuddler," said the left Pegasus.

"And...well..." The Unicorn stopped, his face twisting in confusion. "Actually, I don't think you ever did anything to me, b-but I've heard all about the stuff you've pulled and, to be frank, you're a screwed-up pony."

Blueblood's mood, which had only just recently been elevated, quickly sank back down. The colt fell back on his haunches, his little eyes quivering with terror. "B-But...I thought you said..."

The three guards, feeling at least a little shame at scaring a small foal, looked about each other with guilt-ridden faces before turning back to face the colt. The right Pegasus cleared his throat before continuing. "What we're saying is, we don't agree with what Shining Armor's been doing. He *really* seems to have it out for you, more than any of the other guardponies we've found." He scratched at the back of his armor. "I mean, it's just not like him. Normally he's actually a pretty nice, easy-going guy."

"And you've managed to put up with the drills *and* the exercises this long," said the Unicorn. "A few of the other ponies were there when you attended the Academy, and...well, they said that there was no way anypony could make you do any of the stuff you're doing now back then. So...I guess what we're saying is..."

"Atten-HUT!"

All three guards immediately snapped back into attention, their bodies becoming as rigid as the statues that decorated the castle gardens. Blueblood, sensing his approaching doom, quickly turned to run towards the door, but was frozen mid-step by a telekinetic field. To the colt's horror, Shining Armor trotted up alongside him, shaking his head in disappointment. "Private Blueblood, did you really expect to be excused from the field without an inspection?"

The magic around Blueblood's jaw dissipated just enough for the pony to talk. "Private? I thought I wasn't an actual guard."

"While you're out here, you are still...technically a guard." Shining rolled his eyes. "Now,

yesterday had extenuating circumstances, but you're here today, and it's time for inspection. Now, present yourself!"

Blueblood's body slid and shifted against his will, his tiny strength being insufficient in the face of the Captain's magic. Before long, he was propped up in a perfectly rigid stance, his eyes staring blankly ahead. Shining Armor looked his little charge over, shook his head in disapproval at his disheveled armor, and finally released his magic, sending the colt splaying out on the ground. "Disgraceful, Private. This armor is dirtied and damaged beyond repair."

The colt started to pull himself back up, only to find himself being lifted up from behind once again. "Still, I guess there's enough in the budget to get you another set. I will have it ready for you tomorrow morning."

Blueblood's eyes widened with surprise as his hooves were set back on the ground, gently this time. He slowly turned to the smiling Captain. "Y-You mean you aren't planning to make me run another hundred laps? Or do push-ups until nightfall?"

Shining Armor chuckled for exactly two-point-six seconds at the colt's accusation. "I'll let it slide this time. But I expect you to take better care of this one, okay? Now, you're dismissed. Go report for breakfast."

The colt smiled, threw a salute, and then retreated, leaving Shining Armor and his newfound potential allies in the guard behind.

By the time the train rattled and rolled into the station, Rarity was already wide awake and almost hopping in place with anticipation.

Her entire life, she had dreamed of a moment such as this. Ever since her mother had first taught her how to sew, and she had learned about the fashion industry from the other dressmakers and tailors in Equestria, she had dreamed of being noticed and recognized for her talents by ponies as high up as Canterlot's Royal Court itself. And even better, and despite her parents, teachers and friends constantly telling her that the one princess they knew about at the time never wore clothing, a filly could only dream of a single complimentary comment from somepony as majestic as her. And now, Princess Luna wanted *her dresses!*

The very moment the doors opened, she darted out onto the platform, boxes upon boxes of clothing and material floating behind her. Ponies from all around dodged for cover as the daydreaming mare pushed and shoved past them without a single care in the world, humming a merry tune. By the time she had made it onto the main streets, there was not a single thing that could ruin her day.

After all, today she was going to make a dream come true...

Despite his pained muscles and morning exhaustion, Blueblood seemed to have a small skip in his step as he made his way to the breakfast table. Not only had he managed to worm his way into the good graces of a hoof full of guards, but he also knew just the right course to take to get back to normal. *All I have to do is be the opposite of who you were before! Oh, Princess Celestia will just love this plan!*

Once he was a few steps away from his seat, Blueblood leaped up like a frog and landed butt-first on the cushion. Celestia herself was already seated across from him, an adult once again, and Luna was still in the middle of her morning paper. Both had cereal-filled bowls laying in front of them; the elder's bowl was almost empty, while the latter seemed content to ignore the flakey bits of cornmeal. In any case, both adult ponies looked up in surprise at the sudden noise.

"Good morning, Your Highnesses!" the deposed royal chirped. "I trust that Equestria is still safe and stable this fine morning?"

The sheer exuberance in the colt's voice was music to Celestia's illustrious ears. She smiled in between bites of her cereal. "Good morning, nephew. I can promise you, Equestria's destruction isn't scheduled for today, so I think we'll be fine another week. I take it you're over yesterday's...incident?"

To the surprise of both Alicorns, Blueblood's grin only grew. "Why, yes! I now know exactly what I have to do!"

Luna nodded along, if only to keep Celestia's suspicions to a minimum. "And what, exactly, are you figuring this time?"

"The problem lies with my upbringing! My parents instilled false values into my brain from birth, and I must do everything in my power to pull myself out of this pit they dug me in!"

And in that exact moment, Celestia's elation deflated like a helium balloon. "Um...things like this aren't..."

"Actually, I think it is a wonderful plan." Luna rolled up her newspaper and set it down on the table. "And I do believe I can help you with this."

Blueblood felt a small tug in his heart at Luna's words. He gulped down the massive lump in his throat, coughed a bit in pain, and finally muttered an answer. "Wh-Why are you helping me now?"

Luna chuckled slightly, sending the colt even further into despair. "If this is about that oatmeal incident from a few days before, I apologize. Celestia and I have spoken since then, and I have promised to make sure you get all the help you need." The mare hopped to her hooves. "I shall return momentarily with a complete list of instructions. Just follow what they say, and you will have proven yourself worthy in no time at all."

Blueblood leaned back in his seat, his eyes never leaving Luna's. Every synapse of his mind told him not to trust the Alicorn who had seemingly dedicated herself to ruining him completely. At the same time, however, any source of assistance could not be turned down easily. "W-Well...if it's not too much trouble..."

No sooner had the first half-syllable left his lips than Luna departed, her hooves crackling like thunder against the castle's marble floor. Celestia opened her mouth to correct her nephew, but before she could mutter a single word, her sister had returned, a parchment scroll levitating behind her. Only the fresh ink still settling on the material made it clear that the words within were written only just recently.

Luna smirked at her nephew's total befuddlement. "And here you go, dear Blueblood. Take this scroll back to your quarters and study it well, for within it lays the key to your salvation." Blueblood stared at the scroll stupefied, prompting a groan from the Moon Princess. "Just take it back to your room and read it. Everything will make sense once you do."

Celestia, on the other hoof, just eyed her sister in suspicion. "Sister, surely you don't think..."

Alas, her words of caution were soon drowned out by the squeals of a triumphant colt. With a tiny cry of victory, he grabbed the parchment and darted away. Once he was gone, Luna slowly sat back down and grinned evilly. "I knew he would take the easy way out."

"Luna...what are you doing?" Celestia said with no small bit of a snarl.

The younger sister gasped in mock horror and placed a hoof over her heart. "Celestia! I am simply doing what you requested of me! How could you possibly doubt your little sister's intentions?"

Before Celestia could whip out a verbal rebuttal, Luna's face downshifted and melted into that of a sobbing puppy. The elder pony's eyes watered as she stared into the deepest, cutest parts of her little sister's face, stopping only when her own countenance threatened to reveal the turmoil spinning about within. "Very well. We shall speak of this later, but for the time being, please don't disturb Blueblood. I think having some time to reflect will be good for him."

Luna nodded. "Understood. I promise not to do anything to that little colt." *Not that I was going to do anything, anyway.*

"I'm glad." Celestia raised the bowl to her lips and slurped down the remaining milk, totally ignoring the disgusted attention of her sister. "Now, are you sure you can handle today? Perhaps I should at least handle the negotiations..."

Luna sighed. "Celestia, we agreed to this, remember? I manage the day every now and then, while you take over the night. Today is my first daytime court since...that time, and I promise I shall make it perfect. And what shall you be doing with your free time this morning?"

Celestia shrugged. "I have a few things planned. Nothing really important at the moment, though. Just remember that if you need anything, I'm one summons away."

Luna nodded. "I shall remember that. Now, if you excuse me, I must finish breakfast. Our advisors have scheduled a morning meeting, and I must not keep them waiting."

Celestia nodded in agreement, climbed back to her hooves, and slowly trotted away. Luna watched her leave, looked about to make sure nopony else was watching, and telekinetically lifted her spoon out of the bowl. The metal instrument tilted, sending the milk and flakes riding within back into the mixture below. Sighing, the Princess willed the spoon to the side, grabbed the bowl with both hooves, and lifted it up to her mouth. In one quick motion, the entire meal slid down Luna's throat, draining the bowl completely save for a few stuck-on cereal pieces and dispensing a good deal of white liquid and soggy brown flakes onto Luna's face and neck.

The Princess lowered the bowl, telekinetically summoned a towel, and began to wipe her countenance...

"A proper princess never slurps."

Luna's entire body froze in a panic. From somewhere deep down the hall, she could hear Celestia's laughter slowly fade...

Luna arrived at the meeting room just as her advisors and visiting representatives entered. The group silently nodded at each other, the non-royals bowing towards their Princess as they did so, and then took their seats. As when Luna had last taken over Celestia's daytime duties, Ruby Dream sat at attention, quill and parchment ready to take notes.

The Princess's eyes scanned the room, taking in all of the ponies around her. Most of them were her usual advisors and appointees, including her Finance Minister, Foreign Affairs Secretary, and a hoofful of others. In addition were a few new faces, included a Colonel from the Equestrian military, a dignitary from Roam, and a teacher from Princess Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns. It was already shaping up to be a nice, full day.

“Gentleponies, I thank you for your prompt attendance,” Luna said. “I understand that we all have other responsibilities today, and I do not wish to hold you here any longer than I have to.” Everypony nodded in acknowledgment. “Now Miss Dream, would you mind reading the notes from Princess Celestia’s meeting yesterday morning?”

Ruby nodded and pulled up one of the nearby piles of paper. “Let’s see... The Finance Minister finally gave his support for the annual budget, which Celestia then sent to your desk for approval. Hoofington petitioned for extended funding for their new concert hall, and has been placed under further review to verify the solvency of the investment. And representatives from Fillydelphia have reported that the flooding has subsided completely, food carts are making it back into the city, and most of the remaining Parasprites have been cleared out completely.”

She flipped a page. “After that, the meeting was excused early so she could prepare for...” The mare paused briefly before lying on the behalf of her bosses. “A very important meeting with an old associate.”

Everypony nodded and whispered acknowledgments towards the attendant. The mare, still unused to all the extra attention her new position brought with it, blushed and shrank into her forehooves. The noise only stopped when Luna tapped her hoof over the table, signaling a return to order. “Very well. I apologize for the abruptness yesterday, but alas, that meeting was...very important.” She sighed. “In any case, we have a lot of business to discuss, so shall we begin?”

The two guards at the front gate watched in stone silence as a single young mare came trotting up, several packages floating behind her. Fortunately, she managed to stop just in time to avoid their razor-sharp wings. “State your business.”

“Good morning, sirs,” said the newcomer. “My name is Rarity, and Princess Luna has graciously placed an order for a few dresses from my boutique in Ponyville. I believe she is expecting me?”

The guards looked at each other, their eyes full of suspicion, before turning back to the unicorn. Rarity’s nerves shook as ever-gnawing terror gradually spread through her central nervous system, but she still stood firm. After all, she had a job to do.

After almost five agonizing minutes, the guards nodded towards each other. The guard on the right spread his wings and took flight towards the main castle...

The Colonel pointed out the last few pages of his report. “And as you can see, enlistment

numbers are up, so despite the low retention numbers, we still have more than enough ponies to keep up our standing forces.”

Luna nodded along as she sorted through the five hundred-page report. Even with just an ancillary glance, she could picture more than a few dozen ways to shave the entire thing down to about a hundred pages total; alas, adherence to her royal duties outweighed her desire to *not* spend three hours reading a report that would not deviate from the last five dozen she had glanced through since her return.

“Thank you, Colonel Thunderstruck.” She gave a quick nod of her head before floating up the next set of documents. “Now, I would like to concede the floor to Gilded Chest, our Financial Advisor, for a report on our country’s exports and...”

A loud knock emerged from the other side of the doorway. The echo bounced from one wall to the next, creating a deafening sound and causing nearly everypony in the room to jump in surprise. Luna in particular could feel the stars in her mane sizzle and frazzle as she almost choked on her tongue. With a frustrated sneer, she growled, “Enter.”

After a few seconds, the door slowly creaked open, revealing one of the guards from the front gate. “Princess Luna, I apologize for the disturbance, but there is a pony outside waiting for you. She says she’s from...Ponyville, I believe.”

Luna’s ears perked up at the name, prompting a conniving smile to spread across her lips. “Very well. Have her escorted to my chambers at once. I will attend to her once our business here is concluded.”

The guard bowed and turned around, the door slamming *loudly* behind him. After a few seconds of silently cursing the very concept of acoustics, Luna shuffled the papers yet again and turned back to her advisors and guests. “My apologizes for the interruption, gentleponies. Now, we were discussing our economic situation, correct?”

Luna was astonished by Rarity’s speed and professionalism. By the time she had finished her meeting, sent Ruby Dream to prepare for the court, and returned to her chambers, the dressmaker had managed to pull mirrors into position, levitate dress boxes into place for easy retrieval, float her pincushion to her side, and even position the window blinds to give just the right amount of light for their purposes. And all this without so much as a simple prompt. After so many fashion shows and modeling jobs, these preparations came to the Unicorn as easily as breathing.

Rarity popped open the first box just as Luna reached her spot in front of the full-body mirror. “You know, so few ponies even have mirrors like those anymore. I had to order my own through

a catalog, and Celestia knows our mailmare has a tendency to misplace packages from time to time.” Her mood darkened. “It’s been five months, and I’m still waiting for that new bedpost.”

Luna smiled and rolled her eyes. The mirror was one of the few things from that prank that she was willing to keep. It was definitely an improvement over the ones in the bathroom, and she still couldn’t get over how wonderful being able to swivel something around was. When she was donating the costumes, she just couldn’t bear to...

No, Luna! Focus on the task at hoof!

“So...how go things in Ponyville?”

Rarity hemmed and hawed as she levitated out an onyx-colored saddle with purple fringes. “Oh, nothing too out of the usual. Twilight and Rainbow Dash have been busying themselves with organizing the start of winter, especially after all the disastrous ones we’ve had the last few years.” She gave a little laugh as she adjusted the straps. “Now, tell me what you think. And please, don’t hold back. I want the honest truth.”

Luna sighed and took a sideways glance in Rarity’s direction. The poor Unicorn’s face was twisted into a heaving pile of worry and anguish. Her upper lip seemed determined to devour her entire chin, her eyes were practically exploding from her head, and her mane seemed to flatten from the sheer amount of perspiration her stress was producing. Any sign of disapproval, no matter how small, would almost certainly end with Rarity collapsing into a well of despair and self-loathing that she may never pull herself out from again.

Sighing, the Princess began the time-honored political tradition of twisting the truth until it resembled a pretzel caught in a fifteen-cart pile-up. “It’s perfectly fine, Miss Rarity. I have not worn a saddle in a long time, but I believe this will do nicely when I next require one.”

Rarity’s mood perked back up almost immediately. Her voice seemed to perk up a few octaves as she levitated the saddle off and began floating over the next outfit: a cloak. “Now, this one is more formal, something built for a state function or dinner.”

“Like the Grand Galloping Gala?”

The minute the words struck Rarity, a tiny nerve under her eye twitched like it had just been injected with pure caffeine. It quivered for a few moments, as if trying to discharge Rarity’s entire eyeball, before falling still once again. “Why, yes! Surely somepony with your grace and poise would become the ‘Belle of the Ball’ with such a wonderful ensemble!”

The telekinetically-held garment gradually draped itself across Luna’s backside before tying the ends around the Alicorn’s royal neck. The outfit itself was made of purple silk, making it hardly fit for actual protection from the cold, and yet fashionable enough to become part of any number of

outfits that matched the color scheme. The hem was embroidered with a gold silk, with several small, red gemstones cut and fashioned across the length of the border. Luna smiled. "It looks lovely, Miss Rarity. You have done a most excellent job with this order."

Rarity's joy doubled in magnitude yet again. She had come expecting to be shot down, and the Princess was truly loving her work! "T-Thank you! Princess Luna, you don't know how much this means to me! Why, I haven't had so much fun designing a dress since..."

The mare froze, her face contorting slightly from frustration as she held her tongue. Luna, however, knew exactly where to strike. "Since the Gala?"

"Y-Yes..." Rarity squinted her eyes and focused her attention on the ground, all in a desperate bid to keep the Princess from seeing how upset she truly was with that memory. "I took great care in designing outfits for my friends and I, all so we could look our best as we lived our greatest night ever, and what happened? Twilight never got to speak to Princess Celestia, Applejack wasted thousands of bits worth of apples, Fluttershy wrote a letter of apology to every animal in the garden, Pinkie Pie got a very ugly letter from some cousin of hers, Rainbow Dash was banned from all Wonderbolts shows for six months, and..." Her fur seemed to darken as her own humiliation came back to the forefront of her mind. "That nephew of yours behaved like a common brigand and ruined my entire night."

"And that made you angry?"

The grinding of Rarity's teeth was answer enough. Luna smirked, her plan coming ever closer to fruition. "I can understand your frustration with Blueblood. Perhaps, if you run into him again, you could have a hoof in straightening him out?"

Rarity said nothing, instead opting to slowly raise her eyes until she could just barely catch Luna's. There was no need to say anything. "Very well. Now, shall we continue? I cannot wait to see more of these wonderful outfits you designed."

When he had awoken that morning, Blueblood had assumed that everything was going to be hard work today. After all, he had to itemize and quantify every single characteristic about himself before he could figure out how to invert those qualities into something his aunt would find worthwhile. And now, thanks to Luna's sudden change of heart, he was in possession of all the answers. Once again, he could avoid some of the messier aspects of work and rise to the occasion.

Now, all he had to do was just follow this checklist.

Alright, let's start from the top.

He traced his hoof across the first line on his list: "Realize that the ancient traditions you were taught are no longer valid." *I think I already did that.*

Step two: "Attempt to eat foods not grown specifically for ponies of your station." *Like that slop from the Gala? I...think I shall do that later.*

Step three: "Acknowledge your faults." *I did that. I acknowledged that everything was my parent's fault. If they hadn't done what they did...*

Step four: "Treat ponies with respect." *But respect should be earned, so...*

The colt moaned and slammed his head into the desk. So far, everything on his list seemed to be in perfect order. He had already done everything he would have done...

Wait.

The colt growled and slammed his head up and down repeatedly. *I'm still thinking like myself! I can't do that! I can't just...assign blame and pass the responsibility to somepony else! I...*

He was officially stuck.

Moaning in defeat, the colt slunk down, sliding all the way out of his seat until he was just a mass of white fur and a horn on the floor. *It doesn't matter what I do. I just...don't know how to do any of these things. I can't stop being Prince Blueblood!*

Growling, the colt held his head between both forehooves. "I...I can't *not* be myself!"

Rarity floated the last dress back into the box and set it aside, all while Luna stretched her limbs and began to relax. Once the garment was safely put away, the dressmaker floated every one of her creations onto Luna's dresser, just barely avoiding a few tiny caramelized apple stains. "I...take it these are all to your liking?"

Luna turned to Rarity and smiled. A shiver ran up the length of the Unicorn's spine, but she still stayed silent. "Very much so. I apologize if I disrupted any of your regular business with such a demanding order..."

Rarity waved both forehooves in a frantic fashion. "Oh, there was no trouble at all! After all, I am a resident of Equestria, and it is my duty...I mean, privilege...oh, that's not right. It's...an honor to work with the royal household, that's all. I never imagined that I...I mean..."

"It is quite all right." Luna's reassurances could not have been timed better; Rarity was within moments of having a Twilight Sparkle-inspired aneurysm. "Now, how much are you asking for these garments?"

Rarity smiled, even as her brain continued to spark and crackle in terror. "Oh, never you mind! Consider them a gift!"

Luna sighed and closed her eyes before trotting over to her dresser. Her magic clung onto one of the drawer handles and pulled it open, revealing, amongst other things, a coin pouch. "I insist on paying, Miss Rarity." The pouch levitated out of the drawer and opened, revealing a good number of bits. Rarity barely fought off the urge to flip out over the sheer amount of money within.

Out the corner of her eye, Luna saw her guest's face light up. *Perfect*. "Actually, if you were interested in making some more bits, I do have another request."

The dressmaker's eyes doubled, no, *tripled* in size at the proposal. "Do you even have to ask? Of course I'd love to!" There was a brief pause as she realized what she had just said, followed by the inevitable panic and desire to save face. "I mean...it's not about the bits, but...I do love you- I mean, working with you, and..."

A single, glittering horseshoe came down and touched the Unicorn on the nose. Rarity broke from her blind rambling and looked up at the smiling Princess Luna. Her entire face turned beet red as she pulled away. "M-My apologies, Princess Luna. I just..."

"I understand completely," said Luna. "Still, if it is not too much trouble, would you mind staying a few hours more and tailor another outfit? I want it to be a special gift."

Once again, Rarity was struck speechless. All she could do was mutter some inarticulate squeaks and nod her head like a foal that had just discovered sugar. Luna just kept on smiling and gave Rarity a little pat on the head in acknowledgment of her service. "I am glad you agree. Now, I must know, how good are you with suits?"

In an instant, the mare was out of her euphoria zone and back in cold, hard Equestria. The light in her eyes dimmed as she shook the foam off her lips. "A suit? As in, for a stallion?"

That would technically be the truth. "It is actually for a colt, a young member of the royal household. He has been having some difficulties lately, and I wanted to surprise him with a new set of clothes. He has...always had an interest in formal gatherings, you understand, and my sister and I agreed that he should have a suit of his own for the next time he attends."

Rarity tapped her chin, her eyes narrowing and lips curling into a small pout. "Well, I mostly specialize in dresses and mare's clothing, but...I have tailored a suit from time to time. Never

one for a colt, mind you, but it shouldn't be *too* different from a filly." Her eyes widened. "B-But I don't have all of my supplies! I brought the pins and tape in case we needed to make adjustments, but..."

"Down in on the first floor of the castle, away from where most of our guests visit, there is a small clothing shop. It is closed for the weekend, but I shall order the guards to allow you entry. Inside should be everything you need."

Rarity grinned. "My goodness, you've truly thought of everything."

Luna's face suddenly became far more stern. "Now, I must be honest with you. He is a difficult foal, and I would not be saddened if you had to discipline him to keep him still."

Rarity sighed. "Well...that does make things more troublesome. But still, I am always at the service of my Princesses, and if this is what you ask, then so be it. Just tell me where I can find him, and I'll get to work right away."

Luna's frown turned back into a smile. "I knew I could rely on you. He is currently residing in the Castle. I will have one of the guards escort you to his quarters."

Okay, let's go over this again...

Blueblood's pint-sized hooves scrapped across the floor as he paced from one side of the room to the other. Despite his low height and light weight, the constant clopping was enough to start making a groove in the floor. His brow rustled with ever-growing frustration. *I know I have to do the opposite of what made me the pony I used to be. But how do I get to that point? Changing a pony's personality is so...*

His hooves skidded to a halt. *Wait, that's it! I shouldn't be focusing on my mind right now! All I have to do is change my body! If I was the most attractive pony in Celestia's court, then I must make myself as ugly as possible! A few boxes of donuts, and I shall...*

His incredibly pointless (and stupid) plotting came to a complete halt as he heard a loud knock on his door. Slowly, the colt pulled himself towards the door, only for the entire thing to come crashing open on its own. Screaming in surprise, Blueblood hopped into the air, flailed about in total defiance of gravity for about five seconds, and then finally galloped onto his bed faster than a tiger chasing a frightened rabbit.

"He~llo!"

Blueblood's ears turned into little spikes. He *knew* that voice...

And then he saw the Unicorn enter, some sewing supplies floating behind her. "Forgive me for intruding like this, but Princess Luna wanted...me...to..."

Rarity's jaw went slack as she saw just who was staring back at her...

For approximately fifteen seconds, any and all motion and thought ceased in that tiny chamber. Blueblood could only feel cold terror coarse its way down his spine as he stared at the pony he had offended so many months ago, while seeing the colt served to reopen all of Rarity's old wounds about that...*event*. Even the dust mites knew better than to scuttle about at that moment.

Neither pony dared to make the first move, if only to keep up what little advantage they had over their rival. It wasn't until Blueblood gave a small cough that Rarity finally said something. "So...you're still a colt?"

Blueblood gave a slow nod. "Y-Yes."

At this point, Rarity knew she had two ways she could react. The first was to give the colt the benefit of the doubt, perhaps even forgive him a little for what happened. After all, his only crime was utterly ruining a night she had planned down to the finest detail for months, tearing her idealism and dreams of romance to shreds like Opalescence claws the couch, and then ruining a dress she had spent Celestia-knows-how-many bits designing with a cake Applejack made after *he insulted her friend's cooking and made a complete flank of himself and humiliated her in front of the most important ponies in all of Equestria AND THEN TRIED TO ASSAULT PRINCESS CELESTIA AND GOT TWILIGHT TURNED INTO A FILLY AND-*

And thus, Rarity went with the second choice: vengeful gloating.

She narrowed her eyes and took a few deliberately slow steps forward. "Well, I can't say I'm particularly unhappy to see you like this. After the way you treated my friends and I, there is just no sympathy left in me for you."

Blueblood sighed. "I know."

Rarity glanced about the room, shaking her head disapprovingly at its untidiness. "And you certainly earned a room like this. No more grand mansions and estates in your future, correct?"

"I guess not." Blueblood's head sank even lower.

The mare smiled and scoffed, practically relishing her "victory" over the oafish Prince Blueblood.

Nonetheless, she had a job to do, and the sooner it was done, the sooner she could report this happy development to her friends. “Now, despite your demotion in status, Princess Luna has requested that I make you a...fashionable new suit. And I can hardly turn down a royal request, now can I?” She floated up her measuring tape, scissors and pincushion. She *especially* took her time floating the mass of needles in front of Blueblood’s face. “Now, shall we begin?”

Luna’s hoof traced its way from one end of the parchment to the next, if only to guide her understanding of the whole situation. “And you say the orange tree’s branches extend onto your property.”

An olive Earth pony with a bandaged head stepped forward. “Yes, Your Highness.”

The Princess nodded and turned to the other pony in this case, a teal Unicorn. “And it was about five days ago that you cut off the branch that landed on your neighbor’s head?”

“Absolutely,” said the Unicorn. “He was taking oranges off of *my* tree...”

“Those oranges were clearly on *my* property!”

“If you wanted oranges so badly, you should have gone to the market and *bought* some!”

“And *you* should have looked before you started chopping like a maniac!”

The pointless arguing would have continued for days had Luna not stomped her hoof at that instant. Both ponies immediately turned about to face their Princess, their heads hung in embarrassment. “Given what I have seen and heard here, there is clearly something going on that stems deeper than some oranges and head trauma. I cannot find any standing to overturn the Civil Court’s ruling on this case, but I would advise you to find a better place to mediate your concerns than at the Royal Court. We have a very full schedule and cannot be expected to handle every minor dispute that happens in Equestria.” She smiled, her grin growing more and more sincere with every chance she had to practice. “Have a good day, sirs. And please, refrain from hurting each other in the future.”

The two ponies grumbled and walked away, but even from her/her sister’s throne, Luna could make out the possible beginning of some kind of reconciliation. Hopefully, they would get the mediation they really needed, and would stop blaming each other. Besides, it was the teal one’s fault anyway. *When will ponies learn not to absent-mindedly cut down tree branches?*

Still, today had been a very productive day. She had already recorded five new issues for Celestia to discuss that night, blessed a marriage, took in some suggestions from the farmers outside of Canterlot, and even got a few petitioners that just wanted to bask in one of the

Princesses' glory. By this point, Rarity breaking Blueblood would just be the cherry topping of a perfect day.

There was still one thing plaguing her mind, though.

Just what is Celestia doing?

Toola-Roola, art teacher at the Canterlot Community College, blew the bangs out of her eyes and trotted up to a violet stallion's painting. After a few glances back-and-forth between the canvas and the fruit bowl. "Very good, Arrowhead, but you need to touch up on your orange. Your strokes are bleeding over into the papaya fruits."

The stallion nodded and smiled. "I will, Mrs. Roola."

Smiling, the teacher walked over to the next student, a pink filly. Again, she examined her pupil's painting before passing damning judgment. "Remember to wash your brush between strokes. The last time I checked, it's a bad sign when bananas have purple spots."

The filly grinned the grinniest of grins. "Gotcha, Missus Roola!"

And at long last, Toola-Roola reached her most troublesome student. She heaved a labored, tortured sigh as she approached the paint-covered Princess Celestia. Her eyes came close to watering as she bore witness to the most heinous insult to fruit bowl painting since that time her little sister hoofpainted over her Harvest Festival entry. Even worse, however, was that...smile her Princess gave, even when she was utterly failing at a task. "Well? What do you think?"

Toola-Roola's brain stretched and folded in upon itself as it tried desperately to find some sort of positive compliment for Celestia's...interesting painting. She had never seen rectangular bananas, or polka-dot pears, or a bunch of grapes shaped into something the size of a grapefruit. "It's...well...a unique...composition."

Celestia's face fell. "You mean it's terrible, right?"

The Princess' moody disposition set off the self-preservation protocols in Toola-Roola's brain. In this case, it was the one designed to keep ponies from being banished or executed for daring to offend their Sun Princess. "N-No...of course not! It just...needs...work." Her temples felt like tiny hammers were trying to break through from inside. "A lot...of work."

The entire classroom became silent, save for the scuffling of hind quarters as ponies tried to get away from the soon-to-be-angry Princess Celestia. The royal mare herself felt her cheeks blush from the humiliation of it all. "I appreciate your desire to placate my feelings, but I am not a foal

that needs her hoof held. If I am making a mistake, please let me know.”

“B-But...”

“That is a royal command, Toola-Roola.” Celestia levitated her paintbrush and pointed towards the rectangular yellow fruit. “I think I captured the essence of the banana quite well. How about you?”

“Erm...well...” Toola-Roola closed her eyes and coughed up the one possible answer she could give. “It’s...terrible, Your Highness. Just...terrible.”

Everypony in attendance gasped in horror. A few savvy adults even dived for cover, just in case the Princess brought the entire sun down on their heads. Toola-Roola herself could barely muster the strength to keep her bladder from releasing. The oncoming doom seemed inevitable...

Then Celestia smiled. “Very well, then. I never had my sister’s artistic talents, as anypony in the Astronomy Guild could tell you. Perhaps I need to work with pencils again and work my way back up to oil-based paints. Would that be all right?”

“Actually...” Toola-Roola cleared her throat. “Perhaps you should...well, start with...crayons and colored pencils again?”

Celestia’s eyes narrowed as she stared at the trembling pony before her. “I suppose you’re right. I have been over a thousand years out of practice, after all.” *And at least I got a picture for Luna out of the class.*

Rarity stretched the tape across Blueblood’s back, reaching from his withers to the back of his loin area. “So, what does Princess Celestia do with you all day? Make you clean tables, perhaps? Or how about scrubbing the kitchen floors until they sparkle?”

“Actually, she has me attending school,” Blueblood muttered. “Magic Kindergarten, to be exact.”

The tape flipped about in the air and rolled around the colt’s barrel. “Hmmm...Never heard of school being used like a prison before. I mean, it always did seem that way when we were foals, but...” She sighed. “Still, I suppose Princess Celestia knows what she’s doing. And just how long does she plan to keep you in there?”

Blueblood’s left ear twitched as Rarity looked over his flanks, her mind going over whether or not coattails would work. “I have no idea. All she said is that I have to prove myself worthy of a second chance before she returns me to normal.”

"You would think that she would give you more explicit instructions, being a princess and all." Rarity looked at her figures, tsked at the findings, and jotted her measurements onto a notepad. "I think I remember why foals are always so much trouble. The proportions are always lopsided."

Blueblood's eyes widened in surprise. "L-Lopsided? You mean, that's different from a grown pony, right?"

"In quite a few cases, yes." Rarity's pencil jotted along the page, making adjustments to the design as needed. "It's just a part of growing up."

"So...I was perfectly symmetrical at the Gala, correct?"

Rarity sighed. *Why does everything today have to relate to that...event?* "I suppose so. You were the most eligible bachelor in Equestria, after all." She smiled wickedly. "Although, I doubt the mares will be lining up to get their hooves on you now."

Unfortunately for Rarity, her attempt at insulting Blueblood fell on deaf ears. The colt leaped into the air with a loud "YI-PEE!" then crashed back to the hard floor with a big, goofy smile on his face. The mare backpedaled in shock from the sudden explosion of exuberant joy, her magic dropping the pad and pencil as she did so. "B-Blueblood?"

"This is perfect!" the colt exclaimed. "I was worrying so much about being the opposite of who I used to be that I never realized I was already halfway there!"

Rarity cocked an eyebrow at this. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind letting somepony else in on this little...joke of yours?"

"Oh, right. You weren't here yesterday." Blueblood spun around and looked up to Rarity. "I finally figured it out last night. All I had to do was act in the exact opposite way from how I behaved as an adult."

Now Rarity was even more lost than ever. Blueblood's train of logic was even more confusing than that time Pinkie tried to explain how donuts worked. (It apparently involved elves.)

"Um...this is...interesting, but I have everything I need here. Now, perhaps you could show me the castle's tailoring shop is? I really must get to work on this."

The Griffin Ambassador simply sat and stared at Luna, his beady little eyes never once leaving hers. The only time he moved his head was to pick at the unsettling meal he had been given: a few rats, skewered and cooked by his own attendants because nopony on the castle's kitchen staff wanted to touch them. It was a miracle Ruby Dream didn't pass out on sight.

The Moon Princess just picked at her own salad bowl, trying her best to fight back the anxiety welling up inside her. It wasn't so much the blood meal that disturbed her; rather, it was just the feeling she got from his eyes. It reminded her of being a small filly, strapped to an oaken table while the Griffin King tried to make her his next meal.

The Ambassador slurped down a tail, swallowed loudly, and spoke in a gruff, almost unnatural voice. "Princess Luna, the agreement the Trade Ministry is proposing is perfectly fair. We are importing more than enough corn and barley to feed our subjects. And besides..." He picked at once of his rats, tearing out its underbelly and a few pieces of intestine. "We find the food ponies are accustomed to...rather tasteless."

The dam finally broke. Ruby, half the guards, and nearly all of the other ponies in attendance reached for their buckets (which Luna had installed in the room just for such a meeting) and quickly expelled their lunches, parts of their breakfasts, and a few other meals they couldn't even remember. Princess Luna just grimaced, doing the best to keep the meeting flowing as smoothly as possible. "Ambassador, we need this agreement so we can import wheat from our other neighbors. We lost a substantial portion of our crops during the Parasprite Infestation, and we cannot allow our subjects to starve because some hatchlings didn't like their creamed corn."

The Ambassador sneered, then tore off another chunk of roasted guts. Fortunately, it was met with a slightly smaller wave of revulsion this time around. "I understand if this is difficult for a bunch of plant-lovers like you to understand, but my kind prefer their meat to any fruit or vegetable you can provide. Now, if you were to, say, reconsider our offer to take your dead off of your...hooves..."

"ABSOLUTELY NOT!"

Luna's hooves crashed onto the table, sending shockwaves in every direction. The Ambassador leaned back in shock, but never lost his smug little grin. "Princess Celestia rejected that...barbaric notion of yours, and I will not overturn her decision just to get a few more bits."

"We would offer *much* more than a 'few' bits," the Ambassador said. "Still, the griffins need meat. Our own hunting grounds are running low, our lakes are overfished, and there is just not enough to go around. Now, you obviously have too many ponies of your own; otherwise, you would not need to deal with these negotiations. All we are doing is giving you a chance to offload some of your dead and...less desirables. And if you will not take us up on this offer, we may have to start looking at more...aggressive measures."

Luna slowly sunk back into her seat, her face returning to a neutral position. "You speak of war, do you not? If we do not give you our deceased, the Griffins will actually try to invade?"

The Ambassador shrugged. "That's up to the High Council. From what I've heard, however, they

will be more than willing to construe a disagreement on your part as a sign of defiance. And we all know who...would..."

The Ambassador's gloating session came to a halt as he heard a noise he had not been expecting come from the Princess. He had come to this meeting to impose his nation's demands on their neighbor's government, to make the Princesses quake in fear. Instead, all he heard coming from Luna was...laughter. The dark blue Alicorn was giggling like a schoolfilly, in spite of a possible war.

"I...fail to see the humor in this."

The Princess let out a few more laughs, along with a rather undignified snort, before she could regain enough composure to answer the bewildered Ambassador. "My apologies, but...are you seriously considering going to war against *Equestria*?"

"If you think you and your sister can intimidate our country, then you are sorely..."

Luna leaned forward slightly, her hooves returning to the table's surface. "My friend, surely your schools still teaches what happened to Opinicus?"

The Ambassador's claw dropped the rat stick as tiny pieces of entrails fell from his beak. His eyes almost sank back completely into his skull, while the furry tip of his tail went fluffy with shock. "I...I don't know what..."

"Forgive me, I did not realize how much of their own past griffins have forgotten in the last millennium." Luna's voice dripped with sarcasm and no small amount of loathing. "A few thousand years ago, Opinicus was the ruler of the Griffin Kingdom, the latest of a thousand-year dynasty. He had conquered many of the pony tribes long ago, and the ones that were not enslaved were served as food in his court. Do you know what happened to him?"

"Of course I know!" snapped the Ambassador. "A volcanic eruption destroyed the capital city, causing the entire kingdom to collapse!"

Luna shook her head, an evil smile curled across her lips. "That was not what happened at all. You see, Opinicus learned that my sister and I existed when we tried to help the remaining tribes migrate to safer lands. He thought we would launch a resistance against his rule, so he decided to stop Celestia by kidnapping and serving me as a lunch. Celestia found out."

The Ambassador's feathers gradually frilled, until he resembled an angry porcupine more than a half-eagle, half-lion creature. His accompanying staff did much of the same thing. "When my elder sister learned what Opinicus was doing, she became quite upset. And by that time, she had become quite a proficient magic user, so she did the one thing she could do. She marched through the capital, her entire body wreathed in flame, until she reached the palace gates. She

demanded that I be released, but Opinicus made the stupid mistake of saying 'No.' That was when it happened."

"Wh-When what happened?"

"When she broke the front gates down, stormed into the dining room, freed me, and then...dethroned Opinicus. Unfortunately, in her rage she forgot to keep her power in check; her power had subconsciously destroyed every weapon, burned down every storehouse, and unlocked every pony's cages and chains, all without taking a single life. By the time she was done, the Griffin Kingdom was utterly broken."

The Ambassador felt a twinge of fear at the...thing sitting across from him, but his griffin pride and disbelief of this whole story finally steeled his nerves enough to slam one closed claw on the table. "Listen, you pompous brat! Do you think you can intimidate us into..."

"Oh, you misunderstand me," Luna gasped. "I was not trying to scare you into an agreement. I am perfectly willing to negotiate for a contract both our nations can agree to. I just thought you should know that Opinicus' downfall was caused when he tried to hurt Celestia's little sister. She might not have the free reign she once had now that she is a princess, but she sees all her subjects as her kin. If you wage war, not only will you be endangering her little ponies, but you will have given her a legal opportunity to act."

The loudest gulp ever heard in Equestria emerged from the griffin's throat. Luna's smile only grew as she pulled out and unfurled a large piece of parchment. "Now, given the current market rate, I believe that..."

Nestled in the far corner of Canterlot Castle's ground floor was the Royal Tailoring and Dressmaking Shop. Despite the name, however, it was far from a general clothing store. The business was opened to suit the needs of everypony but the ones that actually owned the castle, as Princess Celestia generally had little need for clothes and Luna's arrival had changed that little. Their primary tasks involved repairing dresses and suits before events such as the Grand Galloping Gala and the Canterlot Garden Party, as well as tending to the non-armor needs of guardponies who could not afford to shop elsewhere on their salary.

Today, however, they had a new purpose.

The shop was deserted as Rarity and Blueblood entered; the shop was only opened on weekends before big events, and even then with only a limited staff. Rarity grimaced as she looked over the supplies, machines, and other tools at her disposal. "You would think somepony working for the royal houses would have a better shop than this."

Blueblood shrugged. "I almost never set hoof in here. I always hired my own private tailors."

"Oh, well!" Rarity's mood suddenly perked back up. Her horn glowed, followed by a chain radiating in the dark. One pull later, and the overhead lamps were turned on, bathing the cluttered mess of a shop in a bright sea of light. The Unicorn trotted over to the nearest sewing machine, her magic causing the machine to spring to life. "I should have this suit done in a couple of hours. Why don't you just...sit over there and wait, or whatever it is colts do."

Blueblood opened his mouth to give some kind of protest, but it did not take long for him to realize the pointlessness of such an action. Sighing, he trotted over to the corner and laid down, his hoof reaching for a box of crackers that had been thoughtfully left by one of the actual staff.

Ruby struggled to keep pace with Luna's hoofsteps, especially in the narrow corridor where her wings couldn't extend without whapping somepony. "And that's the end of your meetings for tomorrow. Are you sure we aren't at war?"

"Positive," Luna said. "The deal we came to was perfectly fair for both nations, and hopefully we have put an end to their demands for our corpses. They were simply playing politics, nothing more. Now, what do I have scheduled next?"

Ruby turned her head towards her open saddlebag, just barely making out the next part of the schedule on the clipboard. "It seems you have some open time before your meeting with the Astronomy Guild. Shall I go ahead and begin preparations?"

Luna nodded. "Very well. I must say, you are adjusting to this quite well. When we first began working together, you could barely give a straight sentence."

Ruby's cheeks turned a deep crimson, even against her already red coat. "Well, that was a rather sudden promotion, and..." She snapped back to reality just as they reached the entrance to the room where the meeting would be held. "With your leave, Princess."

Luna smiled at her attendant. "Make sure everything is perfect. I shall be retiring to my chambers to read over some of the new reports. Inform me when the hall is fully ready."

Rarity nodded as she floated over another bolt of black cloth. Blueblood simply looked over the designs on the floor, all while munching down on some crackers. The entire room swam in a mixture of barely-contained tension and the sound of mechanical needles plunging into fabric.

Finally, Blueblood spoke up. "Miss Rarity, about the Gala..."

Rarity froze for a half-second before returning to her snipping and measuring, her eyes never leaving her work station. "If you're planning on apologizing about that night's...misadventure, I would appreciate it if you would just drop the subject."

Blueblood winced. Even his foal brain was able to pick up on the sheer amounts of concentrated bile radiating from every word Rarity said. His ears flattened as he returned to his crackers and drawings. "I...I know my behavior was unjustifiable. No pony should ever be treated in such a crass manner, regardless of social standing." He winced again as the fabric shifted ever-so-slightly to the right, followed by a hair suddenly springing out of place on the back of Rarity's mane. "I was just...raised to behave that way."

"You mean, your parents actually told you that acting like a ruffian was how a prince should be?" Rarity scoffed at the very notion. "I know that if I ever acted in such a way, my father would have at the very *least* grounded me for a month."

Blueblood jumped to his hooves and walked up closer to Rarity, making sure he stayed outside of bucking range. "I wouldn't use the same terms, but yes. My parents were very much members of Canterlot's gilded elite. In order to keep such ranks, a pony has to ensure that the ponies beneath them know their place in the order of things." He fell back on his haunches. "I will admit, you were ravishing in that dress. That's why I was interested in keeping your company. But at the same time, you weren't of the same class. You weren't a princess from some neighboring kingdom, or even a duchess for that matter. Sadly, that was about as low as the acceptability scale would go."

It was fortunate Blueblood could not see Rarity's eyes at that moment, for he would have most likely melted into a pool of white-and-gold liquid at the sheer amount of hate radiating from her eyes. Nonetheless, the dressmaker continued on, her generous nature fighting off the urge to strangle Blueblood within an inch of his life. "Well, it's so *lovely* that your parents *itemized* everypony's rank. I'm certain that's absolutely vital."

"For a while, I thought it was." Blueblood lowered his head. "And then this happened. I've had time to think, to take a look at the pony I used to be and...well, I realized I wasn't exactly the wonderful stallion I thought I was. In fact, I...I was a monster. And...I wanted to apologize."

"Tut tut!" Rarity tsked. "I told you, there is nothing to apologize over." She pulled the first layer of the suit out of the sewing machine and floated over the next piece of cloth to the table for cutting. "Besides, it's already far too late for that. The Gala is already over, my best night ever never came to be, and you apparently wanted to burn our village down because *you* were a crass, brutish, undignified cretin!"

The scissors suddenly slid off the straight line Rarity had previously marked until she had snipped a wavy line in the material itself. The mare sighed, snipped off the ruined piece, and quickly

began to measure out a new piece. Blueblood, meanwhile, hunched closer to the ground, a few tiny tears forming along his eyes. "Oh, forgive me! I thought I was all over that night, but..."

Blueblood sniffed and wiped his eyes dry. "I understand. You have every right to hate me. You must have really wanted to spend the night with me."

Rarity nodded, her magic opening and closing the scissors in a slow, consistent pattern. Measure twice and cut once, after all. "That would be an understatement. You were the stallion of my dreams, after all. The only reason I wanted to attend the Gala was to get close to you."

Despite his desperate situation, Blueblood gave a small chuckle. "I can see why. A pony of your grace and wit must have known everything there is about me before you attended. My likes and dislikes, how I loved my toast butter-side down, and all that."

Rarity's cutting slowed to a snail's pace as her eyes rolled towards the colt. "I...Of course I knew all that."

Blueblood stood and turned around, not daring to show his face to the mare he had wronged. "I admit, I once thought you only wanted my attention because of the tabloids and not myself. But now I know it was just me trying to justify treating you like garbage. No pony that could save Equestria twice over would be attracted to me just because I was a prince."

The snipping of Rarity's scissors ceased entirely as the front locks of her mane began to frazzle. "Wh-Why...of course I would never do such...such a thing..."

"It's not like it matters or anything," Blueblood said in a low, defeated tone. "I'm never going to be able to make it up to you. At this rate, I shall be stuck as a stupid colt for the rest of my life. How does one act in an opposite way from how they usually behave?"

Sensing that she was off the hook at the moment, Rarity looked back down at her design, double-checked her cutting figures, and finally resumed cutting and sewing the suit. As much as she wanted to avoid answering the colt's question, however, her mind just could not let it go. "You know, I think you're thinking about this the wrong way. A leopard can't change his spots, after all."

Blueblood looked back up at the mare, his eyes wide with despair. "Y-You mean I'll be stuck as a horrible, village-burning monster forever?"

"Well...no," Rarity said. "What I mean is, instead of radically changing who you are, just start making adjustments to your life. Perhaps, instead of rejecting my friend's apple products as slop, you actually give them an honest try and accept them for what they are. Or, perhaps you use your connections and political savvy to actually do some good for somepony, rather than just advance yourself in the social stratosphere."

"But that's not going to get me back to normal!" Blueblood whined. "I have to do something quick and soon!"

With a quick tug, Rarity pulled the other layer of the suit's jacket from the machine. "Then why are you in such a hurry? If the Princess is really trying to make you a better pony, then perhaps you should take things more slowly. Canterlot wasn't built in a day."

The room fell silent once again, save for the frustrated moans of Blueblood. The colt sank down on the floor once again, his eyes half-closed in a vain attempt to hold back the severe pain all this thinking was causing. "I...suppose so. But I really cannot stay like this for much longer. I'm an adult. I haven't been locked in my room and harassed by bullies daily since I finished boarding school." He let out a mournful sigh. "At least I know you are a trustworthy, honorable..."

"ALRIGHT, I'M GUILTY!"

The sudden outburst sent Blueblood galloping under a nearby chair for cover, his tiny frame barely fitting in the mess of supports and legs. Rarity's once-pristine eyes were now bloodshot with self-inflicted rage, her very lips trembling from the frustration of it all. She didn't even turn to face Blueblood fully, instead opting to just give him a side view of her disheveled face. "I knew nothing about you! NOTHING! All I heard was that Princess Celestia had a gorgeous nephew that I had to meet!"

Blueblood's face went white(r). "Y-You mean...you were the same as..."

"I always wanted to live in Canterlot, ever since I was a filly." Rarity choked back a few guilt-ridden sobs. "Ever since my mom taught me how to sew, I've dreamed of being able to design clothes for the greatest ponies in all of Equestria! A-And I just...wanted to get closer to her! I...I..." The mare collapsed to the ground, her eyes overflowing with salty tears. "I just wanted a prince charming!"

One part of Blueblood wanted to roll his eyes at the spectacle. He had seen similar reactions, especially during the Great Romance Novel Plague that once threatened to swallow the entire court in a sea of sappiness and melodrama. Even Cadance had caught the bug, begging Blueblood to read her stories she had snuck out of Princess Celestia's room. Fortunately, neither one was old enough to understand everything that was going on, or why the adults were hugging each other in funny ways and constantly kissing parts other than a mouth. Even more fortunately, Celestia wasn't into the more extreme ones, so he didn't have to explain how Cadance had a sudden understanding of pony anatomy.

At the same time, however...

"I'm sorry."

Rarity's head perked up mid-sniffle. "Wh-What?"

The colt slowly trotted over, his head hanging low. "I didn't mean to upset you. In fact, all I've done is make ponies mad at me for some reason or another. Princess Luna hates me, some foals at school want me dead, and now I've even ruined your life."

Rarity shook her head. "N-No, you haven't done anything of the sort. I still have my friends, my family, and my boutique. I just...wished that things could have..."

Blueblood tapped a hoof against his cheek. This whole "thinking" thing was not really part of the skills a member of the Canterlot elite was expected to have; "scheming" and "undermining" were far more desirable disciplines than actually analyzing a situation critically. Still, he did have a conclusion. "Well...I'm here now. Obviously there is no way you would be interested in me the same way, so...perhaps we can talk?"

Rarity's jaw hung, her eyes quivering like swirling washbasins. "...I suppose that will be...nice."

"And t-then Sweetie Belle used all of my Baby Blue Sapphires on this lovely little arts and crafts project of hers!" Rarity barely fought off another round of laughter at her little sister's expense, even as Blueblood just rolled his eyes at such youthful silliness. "Now, I will admit I was quite upset when I first saw what she had done, but after I took a closer look at her work, I realized how...utterly lovely it was."

"Yes, well, I never really did make much for my parents," Blueblood said. "There was that Parent's Day poem I wrote once, but thankfully it has been purged from Equestria."

Rarity's magic pulled at the small bowtie, tugging it until it was just snug enough to be fashionable. That task accomplished, she floated over the black coat. Blueblood, having done this a hundred times in his former life, leaned back on his haunches and raised his forelegs, allowing the fabric to fall into place and look through the appropriate limbs. Once everything was in position, he slid his hooves down and began fumbling with the buttons.

"You know, about your parents..."

Blueblood seized up as the words penetrated his eardrum. "Miss Rarity, I appreciate your company, but...I would rather not speak of them again. After all, they did make me who I was."

Rarity shook her head sadly. "That's not how it works at all, Blueblood. Parents are supposed to teach you how to walk, talk, behave, and if they have any sense at all, how to be fashionable."

But that doesn't mean you're stuck following them completely."

"...Huh?"

"You see, my parents are..." Rarity's face scrunched up slightly as she mulled over the kindest possible words for this situation. "Somewhat...slightly...in a manner of speaking...completely and utterly uncouth. My mother couldn't match a pair of sweat pants with a sweater to save her life, and my father...well, I don't care how great he was at hoofball, but it wasn't until I moved out that he finally realized I *wasn't* going to bring home any trophies."

She rolled her eyes at the small flood of repressed memories spewing about in her brain. "Point is, I didn't have to follow everything they did. I mean, I learned a lot from them, and they weren't *bad* by any means, but I didn't have to repeat their life. Am I making sense?"

Blueblood shrugged. "I suppose. Still, this is going to be irritating." He looked up at Rarity sheepishly, his hooves resuming their epic quest to fit the buttons in the right holes. "But...I'm glad you came here. I've thought about the Gala quite a bit, and...I'm sorry. For everything. Can...Can you forgive me?"

Rarity's mouth closed instantly, her eyes never wandering from Blueblood's. Standing in front of her was the stallion that had ruined everything and tried to burn her village to the ground. She was in the perfect position to destroy him once and for all, to smash his ego so hard that it would never rebuild.

But no matter how much she reassured herself that it was right, she just couldn't do it. In all honesty, she had almost completely forgotten about Blueblood until that whole incident with Celestia. And even then, she would have probably pushed it out of her mind had Luna not invited her over and...

Her eyes tripled in size and intensity. Her hooves trembled as realization took hold.

That...She...I...

"Um...Miss Rarity?"

The colt's little voice was enough to snap Rarity back into reality. The mare's face trembled as her nerves slowly pushed away any obvious signs of discontent, until she was back to just smiling happily with a starry-eyed look in her eyes. Blueblood's suit, a double-breasted attire with gold-painted buttons, a white shirt, and a little bow tie, was now completely on the former Prince. "This is a very nice suit. Do you make a lot of these?"

Rarity gave a fake smile. "Well, yes, of course. I *do* run a boutique, after all. I am so glad we had this chance to talk, but I have some pressing business. I'm sure the guard can show you back."

"Oh...I understand." The colt sighed as Rarity began walking away, her trot gradually turning into a canter. Before she could leave, however, he managed to cry out once more. "Wait! You never answered my question?"

Rarity froze at the doorway, turning her head just enough for the colt to catch her smile. "Yes, I suppose I do. At least, I don't despise you like I once did. And given what you did, that is a start."

Her answering complete, the mare left the small shop, leaving the colt alone again. *Why am I always just getting "starts?"*

Luna was in the middle of hanging her new dresses in her wardrobe when Rarity returned. Her victory assured, she smiled, closed her eyes, and spun about. "I assume everything is in or—"

"How *dare* you use me like that!"

Luna's eyes flung open, only for her to wish they had remained closed. The Rarity that now stood before her was not the same pony that had left her room only a few hours before. Her features had darkened into a black cloud of disgust and frustration, her eyes threatening to fire death beams right through Luna's skull. The Moon Princess quickly began to take a few steps backwards, just in case the Unicorn decided spending the rest of her life in a dungeon was worth the opportunity to run her horn through the Alicorn's throat.

"I...I do not understand..."

Rarity took a few stomps forward, her entire body slinking closer to the ground with every step. "You didn't invite me here for some dresses! You wanted me to sabotage your nephew's rehabilitation!"

Luna's head blushed so red, it seemed like a second sun was threatening to form underneath her cranium. Given the amount of sweat pouring down, that was not far from the truth. "Please, Miss Rarity! I...I really was interested in your designs, honest! But this is a matter of the utmost important to the state!"

Rarity's eyes both winced from the sheer frustration of Luna's statement. "How is crushing a colt's spirit somehow the keystone to all of Equestria?"

"Because he tried to assault Celestia!" Luna snapped. She leaned forward, trying to look as imposing and authoritative as possible. "And do you not remember how he ruined the Gala? How he destroyed your ideals because of his boorish behavior? Surely a pony like you can..."

Rarity scoffed and rose back to her natural standing position. “Yes, I was very upset with what he did, but I would never try to do what you’ve done today. I was angry when Twilight was regressed, but the colt I saw today was nothing like the Blueblood I knew. He is changing, Princess Luna. Whatever it is that Princess Celestia is trying to do is working, and *you* are too blind to notice.”

“He is a monster! Something like that doesn’t deserve to live! Not after what he...”

“We forgave *you*, didn’t we?”

Every hair on Luna’s body stood on end. Her lips quivered, her eyes widened, and her cheeks burned. “Y-You d...dare to speak to thy Princess...” Luna muttered, her voice barely rising above a whisper.

Rarity stuck up her nose and cantered around the room, pausing only to levitate the empty boxes onto her back. “Remember when we first met? We could hardly speak, mostly because you were busy *trying to destroy Equestria*. You tried to kill me, my friends, and the most glorious moustache ever known. And do you know what happened? We used the Elements, cleanses you of whatever it was that was controlling you – Twilight always was better at understanding those things – and your sister gave you back your title on the spot.”

“Th-That has nothing to do with...”

The last of the packages landed gracefully on Rarity’s back. “The colt I saw back there wasn’t the same one that held me in front of a cake.”

Having said her piece, Rarity humphed one last time and began trotting out of the chamber. She paused and turned only when she was at the door’s edge. “You can keep the dresses. And perhaps, when you’ve learned your own lesson, you can write me and place another order. I think you will find me to be a most...*forgiving* pony.”

And with that, she was gone.

Luna watched as the door closed. She was barely able to see the other side of the room from behind the small fires burning in her retinas. *H-How dare she? I care not that she is one of the ponies that saved me, nopony speaks to their Princess in such a manner! I invite her to the castle to sell her wares, and she repays my kindness with condemnation? The arrogance!*

Her breathing became labored and erratic. *I will see her punished for this. She and Blueblood both will suffer greatly for this affront.*

A small whimper emerged from the back of her throat. *Perhaps I should consult with Twilight and the rest of her friends. They should know of a weakness in Miss Rarity’s character.*

Her body shook with growing anxiety. *I...I...I will...see...her...I...do not care...if she...thinks I am...a...*

The tears fell. *Villain.*

The Sun Princess knocked on her sister's door, her affront to the art world leaning on the wall next to her. "Hello? Luna"

No answer.

Shrugging, Celestia tried the doorknob. Fortunately, it turned out to be unlocked, and the door soon opened.

And Celestia found herself wishing it had remained closed.

Her sister's bedroom was in absolute shambles. Her sister's dresser and wardrobe were tossed over as if a giant dragon had flipped them with his claws. The bed was stripped bare, while chicken feathers from Luna's pillows were strewn about. A mirror, the same one used to torture Celestia during Luna's prank, was now shattered, as if it had been bucked with great force. The entire room was a disheveled, destroyed mess.

And sitting in the far corner was Princess Luna herself. She made no attempt to move from her little area of the room; indeed, she did not even seem to notice that Celestia was there to begin with. The only noise to be heard was the Alicorn's sob and chokes.

Celestia quickly stepped inside, closing the door behind her lest somepony else see this mess. Still, Luna made no effort to even turn around. "Luna, what's wrong?"

Nothing.

Fortunately, Celestia's long limbs soon proved to be an advantage, as she was able to easily sidestep much of the mess and reach Luna's position without tripping on books or cutting herself on broken glass. Even with somepony directly behind her, however, Luna seemed completely withdrawn from the world. With a mournful sigh, Celestia bent down on all fours and extended a wing over Luna's back. "Sister, please. Did you do all this?"

Finally, Luna could ignore her no more. She nodded her head, a small whimper emerging from her throat as she did so. Celestia's eyes widened with the horrific implications this news provided. "What happened, exactly?"

"I-It's not important," she whined.

"Whenever it concerns you, it's always important," Celestia said. She leaned in closer, nuzzling her sister along the cheek. "Now, tell me everything."

"I-It was...I invited Rarity from Ponyville over...to buy some dresses." Luna's entire body shivered as she realized there was no way Celestia would buy such a lie.

Her fears soon turned true. Celestia narrowed her eyes and pulled her face away in frustration. "You mean, you had her come here to torment Blueblood some more. Luna, I thought we had discussed all this."

"I...I just wanted to...make him work for his...redemption," Luna muttered. She snorted back another noseload of snot and wiped her eyes on Celestia's wing. "At least, that's what I thought. I...I have no idea anymore..."

Celestia's eyes narrowed some more, now little more than small slits on her face. "So, what happened with Rarity?"

Luna shook her head furiously. "W-We talked some, I tried the dresses on, and then I asked her...to...to make Blueblood a suit. I-I-I wanted her to push his buttons, make him suffer! B-But when she came back, she was yelling at me! She said I was a..." She choked. "Monster."

The older sister recoiled at the word. She knew first-hand about her sister's mental state, especially after the whole Nightmare Moon incident. She also knew, however, that there was no way Twilight's friends would ever call her such a thing. Well, save for Spike, but he was a child, after all. "So, you responded by destroying your room? Sister, are you still six hundred years old?"

Luna haunched her entire body to the ground. For the first time, Celestia could see the small cut marks along her legs. "I...They were the ones that saved me! I wanted them to at least respect, if not love me! A-And now she hates me, and she's going to tell everypony else in Ponyville what a monster I am, and..."

"Luna, I'm sorry things went wrong, but you have to accept that you made a bad decision," Celestia said in her usual, motherly tone. "You used a pony that trusted you just to get revenge on a pony I told you to leave alone for the time being. Even after I told you to let your hatred go, you just..."

Luna's head jerked up so fast it almost slammed right into Celestia's snout. The Princess recoiled in shock as she saw her sister's eyes, now overflowing with tears of self-hatred and loathing. "I know that! I want to stop so much, b-but I cannot do it! I cannot let him go! Do you really think I want to hate him? Our own nephew? B-But...he is such a...was such a...I...I..."

All the bitterness in Celestia's heart, all the frustration she had been building up towards her sister since she first proved her intentions for Blueblood, melted away in the sight of her anguish. Even worse, she could remember thinking much the same way only a few months before. "Luna, we have to get past all this hatred. For now, however, I want you to take the rest of the day off. The night, too. We shall speak more of this tomorrow."

Before the Princess could rise, however, Luna's forelegs were trapped around her neck and pulling her down. The younger sister's face became even more twisted in alarm. "N-No! I-I-I'm fine! I can manage the day just..." Her features softened as she let out a yawn. "...Fine...on...my...ooooooooown."

Luna's body went as limp as a rag doll just as Celestia's horn stopped glowing. Sighing, the Sun Princess picked herself off the floor, levitating the nearby Moon Princess onto her back for easy travel. *I'll put her in my room for now. That spell should last until sunrise tomorrow.*

She sighed. *But it won't solve anything. She and my nephew have to come to some kind of understanding. Perhaps...*

Then it hit her. The perfect solution. The thing those flyers she got in the newspapers sometimes told her about. The one way to bring families together, and yet was the thing everypony feared doing.

A family activity.

TO BE CONTINUED...

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