

## A Study In Rainbows

### **Chapter Two:** The Art of the Dress

By Thanqol

We met next day as Rarity had arranged, and inspected the rooms at No. 221B, Baker Street, of which she had spoken at our meeting. They consisted of a couple of comfortable bedrooms and a single large airy sitting-room, cheerfully furnished, and illuminated by two broad windows. So desirable in every way were the apartments, and so moderate did the terms seem when divided between us, that the bargain was concluded upon the spot, and we at once entered into possession. That very evening I moved my things round from the hotel, and on the following morning Rarity followed me with an endless series of bags. She had enlisted the help of several earth ponies to help her carry all of her equipment across, and I found myself hiding when I noticed that one of them was the brother of Applejack, the loan shark, and a huge stallion besides. For a day or two we were busily employed in unpacking and laying out our property to the best advantage. That done, we gradually began to settle down and to accommodate ourselves to our new surroundings.

Rarity was a less difficult companion than I had originally envisioned. Other than a constant humming as she worked at her dresses, she was mostly quiet in her ways, and other than a habit of obsessive cleanliness her habits were regular. My own natural tendencies lend themselves to slovenliness, but as long as I kept my mess out of her sight she seemed content to allow it.

Nothing could exceed Rarity's energy when inspiration struck her, and fabric seemed to flow through her sewing machine like water, but when she was short of ideas she became morose and whiny. Now and again, despair would strike her and she would tear apart her designs, and slump on the couch in such a stupor I might have suspected the use of narcotics had not the cleanliness of her life dispelled the possibility.

As the weeks went by, my interest in her and my curiosity as to her aims in life began to deepen. Her very appearance was stunning, turning heads all down the street to stare at her brilliant purple mane and silver-white coat. Her eyes were stunningly blue and, paired with her eyelashes, capable of great expression. Her perfect grooming, maintained no matter how deep her despair, had me constantly self conscious to my ruffled rainbow coloured hair and filthy hooves. Oftentimes I entertained the idea of asking her assistance in making myself presentable, but my pride - and the memory of Gilda's parting words - forbade it.

The reader may imagine what they will of me when I confess just how much this unicorn stimulated my curiosity, and how often I endeavoured to extract the true mind and motivation behind this fascinating creature. Before pronouncing judgement, one must remember how boring Ponyville was. No races, no weather worth fighting, no pony capable of challenging me

physically (short of that Applejack character and her goons, but the less I saw of them the better).

The things she found to occupy her time I also found strange. She hardly studied magic at all; in fact, I found her neglect of it to be far outside all my previous experience with Unicorn battle mages in the army. The few times I saw her experimenting with magic was to perfect some minor cantrip, such as a spell to locate gold or to solidify mud. These tasks, however, were not curios of laziness - she genuinely put as much effort into mastering these trivialities as other Unicorns spend learning the art of Teleportation or Levitation.

Her ignorance was frequently astounding. Of literature, modern music, politics, celebrity and philosophy she knew nothing. I once absently quoted the Red Stallion's famous line about reasons to win and she inquired in the naivest possible way who I might be referring to. My surprise reached its zenith when I accidentally found she was ignorant to even the role of Celestia in raising the Sun! As far as she was aware, this happened via automated means! The thought is still so astounding I can scarcely imagine how this lack of education occurred.

And then, in the most vexing way imaginable, she said, "You appear to be astonished," with that small, cheeky smile, "And now that I do know it, I shall have to do my best to forget it."

"To forget it!" I cried.

"You see, I consider a pony's brain to be like a pony's body, that might be dressed with various skills and fragments of knowledge. A truly stunning dress is one that is elegant, simple and designed perfectly for its function. Ponies who acquire knowledge they will not use are guilty of over dressing and risk arriving at a show covered with so much unwieldy fabric that they can scarcely move. I have my work; anything unrelated to that work is wasted design space."

"But the sun! The moon!" I protested.

"What the hay does it matter to me?" Rarity interrupted impatiently, "You say a pony raises the sun every morning. If it was raised by an enormous scarab beetle rolling it across the sky it would not make a jolt of difference to me or my work."

I was on the verge of asking her just what such work might be, but her haughty return to her sewing informed me that she was no longer in the mood for conversation, so I held my tongue. An idea later came to me as I flew casually through the Ponyville skies; I could, perhaps, deduce her area of competence by making a list of her talents and determining the logical application for a pony of such skills. Taking a pencil in my mouth, I admit to having a bit too much fun assembling the following list:

Rarity, her limits

1. Knowledge of historical literature: Nil

2. Philosophy: Nil
3. Astronomy: Nil
4. Politics: Feeble
5. Botany: Mixed. Can't tell an oak from an elm but has curious knowledge about plants with practical application
6. Geology: Has a deep and abiding terror of mud, but is oddly able to articulate exactly what type of mud she is currently scrubbing from her hooves and ~~whining~~-complaining about exactly how difficult it is to remove.
7. Fashion: Profound.
8. Medicine: A talented dabbler. Has excellent skill in the few procedures and remedies she has chosen to investigate, and has no talent for curing anything as simple as a cough.
9. Sensational Literature: Immense. I have a deepening suspicion she exists on a diet of sequins and trashy romance and crime fiction novels.
10. Sings excellently when the mood strikes her.
11. Knows predominately spells for locating, sculpting and identifying. Probably couldn't run a race if her life depended on it.
12. Has a good, practical knowledge of Equestrian law.
13. Total dweeb.

When I had got this far in my list, I scrunched it up and threw it off the side of my cloud in frustration. "I cannot think of anything that requires such a random jumble of skills. I may as well give up the attempt at once."

I see that I have alluded to Rarity's skills with music, and these were remarkable, if baffling. She knew a selection of ancient, classical tunes which she occasionally conjured with magic, and seemed capable of coming up with detailed song and dance numbers on the slightest prompting, and yet when I mentioned such household names as the Eurobeat Pony or DJ. Scratch, she gave me a look of blank incomprehension. Her refusal to even listen to their music at many points frustrated me immensely.

During the first week or so, we had no callers, which I found unusual. Surely a pony as glamorous and sophisticated as Rarity was not as friendless as I, an unwashed pegasus from Zebrica? Presently, I began to discover she had many callers. There was a shy, yellow pegasus who wore a leather coat and was introduced to me as Fluttershy, there were occasional visits from Applejack's little sister, Applebloom, and an increasingly colourful assortment of ponies, including a light green unicorn, a grey pegasus and others. Whenever any of these ponies would make an appearance, Rarity would beg the use of the sitting room and I would retire to the clouds and work on re-learning my signature moves.

She always apologised for this inconvenience, "I use this room as my place of business, and these ponies are my clients." She would say, and once again I would be presented with a chance to ask her point blank about the nature of this business, but Gilda's disapproving eyes and mouthed 'dweeb' always came to mind and I would depart without complaint.

It was on the 4th of March, as I have good reason to remember, that I arose somewhat earlier than usual and found Rarity eating her breakfast. The landlady, one Mrs. Cake, had grown so accustomed to my habit of napping that my coffee had not even been prepared yet. With unreasonable petulance I rang the bell and gave the curt intimation that I was ready. I then picked up a magazine from the table and began to page through it. Books were not my style normally, especially ones as eggheaded and nerdy as this, but I was short of other things to focus upon.

It's somewhat ambitious title was "Art of the Dress", and it attempted to show how much an observant pony might learn from the way a pony presented his or herself. It's most outrageous claim was that even ponies who went unclothed could be communicating as much detail about themselves as ones who had dressed specifically for the event. Deceit, according to the author, was impossible when everypony wore their feelings quite literally on their sleeves.

"What ineffable twaddle!" I cried, casting it aside, "I have never read anything so dweebish in all my life!"

"What is it?" Asked Rarity.

"This article, of course," I said, pointing it out. "It's so impractical it irritates me. Some egghead in an armchair thinks that she can figure anything out by looking at it. I should like to see her actually cram herself into a third class carriage with the rest of us and try to name the feelings of every pony there with her. I bet a thousand bits she wouldn't be able."

"You would lose your money," Rarity remarked haughtily, "As for the article, I wrote it."

"You!"

"Yes, I have a turn for both observation and deduction. The theories expressed there, which you find so chimerical, are really extremely practical. So practical I depend upon them for my living."

"And how?" I asked involuntarily.

"Well, I have a trade. My own idea, actually, and I believe I am still singularly unique amongst all detectives for it," she sipped her tea with a smile, "City detectives are trained in academies by the thousands. Private detectives are a bit a dozen. But I, Rarity, am a Consulting Detective. When these mass-manufactured charlatans require assistance with a case they come to me, and I put them back on the right path. Fluttershy, for example, is a well known detective. She recently got herself into a muddle about a forgery case, which was why I asked her here."

"What was the problem, then?"

"Simply put that she could not raise her voice enough for the key witness to understand her questions."

"Ah."

"And these other ponies?"

"Mostly private inquiry agencies. I do their work, they listen to my comments, and I pocket a fee."

"And little Applebloom?"

"Ah, to peer too deeply into the politics of the Apple family is to gaze into the face of madness."

"I see. But you mean to say that you can unravel cases that stump these famous characters without even leaving this room?"

"Quite so. I have something of an intuition when it comes to crime. Every now and then something comes up which is more interesting, and I have to investigate myself, but I find that the vast majority of crimes are so easy and banal as to barely require the exercise of my intellect. The rules of deduction, which you so scorned Miss Dash, are second nature to me."

Perhaps something of my scorn showed on my face, because Rarity suddenly seemed very focused. "You remember on our first meeting you expressed surprise at me noting you had come from Zebrica."

"Gilda probably blabbed behind my back."

"Nothing of the sort! The reasoning ran so quickly that I barely noticed it; the train of thought went something like this: "Here is an athletic young pegasus, yet she walks rather than flies, and her wing is stiff against her flank. From this, we can deduce the wound to your right wing. From your association with the griffon I can determine you were part of an elite unit, and from her subtle deference to you I can determine that you outranked her. Probably Best Young Flier material, then. So what has a pegasus of such skill out of commission and looking for work in Ponyville? The obvious answer was injuries sustained in the line of duty."

"This is quite incredible," I said, "But it does not relate to Zebrica in any way that I can see."

"I noticed the scorch marks around your back hooves from kicking too many lightning clouds. Only Zebrica has weather stormy enough to be regularly weaponized by the Equestrian armed service. Simple deduction."

"When you put it so, it seems obvious."

"Such things are obvious when one thinks in the correct manner."

"You remind me of Edgar Allen Pony's Derpin."

"Bah!" Rarity looked offended, "Derpin was a hack and a fraud. Her habit of breaking into her friends' thoughts after fifteen minutes contemplation was showy and superficial. She had some analytical genius, to be sure, but she was by no means such a phenomenon as Pony cared to imagine. And she was walleyed half the time."

"Have you read Gazelle's works?" I asked eagerly, "Does Lecoq come up to your idea of a detective?"

"Lecoq was a miserable bungler." Rarity said, waving a hoof in a dramatic dismissal, "Only one thing to recommend her, and that was her energy. That book made me positively ill. I could have cracked the case in twenty four hours, and she took six months. And oh, her dress sense! I don't often judge a book by its cover but she was simply an abomination!"

I felt rather indignant. I had thought that Lecoq's style was cool and had a great respect for the Pegasus Detective Derpin. I stalked over to the window grumpily, muttering something along the lines of, "She thinks she's so smart, huh?" under my breath.

"There are simply no crimes and no criminals these days," Rarity said suddenly, dramatically. "What is the use of having brains in our profession? No pony has put the same amount of effort into the study of natural talent and crime as I, and what is the result? There is no crime to detect, and if there is, it's some bungling villainy so transparent even one of the mass manufactured detectives at Coltland Yard can see through it."

"I could be famous any time I wanted, miss Dash," Rarity said, suddenly sounding deeply saddened. "I could walk out there, any time, and into a legend. But what would be the point? I do not want to get there by thwarting some schoolyard prank. I need a genuine test. A genuine challenge worthy of these skills I have spent so much time accumulating."

I was still annoyed at her style of conversation, so I thought it best to change the topic.

"I wonder what that fellow is looking for?" I said, gesturing at a black stallion stalking down the street with an envelope in his mouth.

"You mean the railpony-come-mercenary?" Rarity said, with barely a second glance at him.

"Oh, as if," I said disbelievingly, "You have no way of proving that."

The thought had scarcely cleared my mind before the stallion suddenly knocked on our own

door. I answered quickly, and he stepped inside without waiting.

"For Miss Rarity," the Pegasus said in a deep, foreboding voice.

"Thank you, on the table will be fine," she said absently.

"Wait!" I said, intercepting him as he turned to leave. My wing ached from the sudden movement but I shook it off. "May I ask your trade, sir?"

"Bodyguard to Miss Applejack, ma'am," he said curtly.

"And before then?"

"I worked on the Railroad. Was injured fighting buffalo. Is there something you need, lady?"

"No," I said, a faint sulk to my voice and closed the door in the stallion's face.

I hated losing.