

My Little Hangover - Part 3

by Mousetrap

Each of the hotels on the Las Haygas Strip were splendidly unique in architecture, style, and theme. Twilight found it fascinating to observe them all from the outside, silently comparing them to their real-world counterparts. The Baylagio looked just like a certain Italian lakeside villa she'd seen once in a book. The Mirage could have been an ancient palace plucked directly from the Ahaybian sands. And though she'd never been to Veneighce, the hotel that bore its name made her long to see the real thing.

Once they actually stepped inside, however, she realized something new about Las Haygas. Namely, every casino looks pretty much the same.

The same colorful slot machines lined the rows upon rows of the gambling hall. The same poker, blackjack, craps, and roulette tables dotted the floor. It was the same lights, same sounds, same frigid air, tacky glitz, the same distant looks on the croupiers' faces. Even the same crowd as the night before (with, perhaps, a few less drunk ponies). Still, the place was huge. Twilight wasn't really sure where to start.

"Big place," Applejack said, echoing her own thoughts. "Dang. I barely remember even bein' here last night."

Pinkie Pie hopped into their path. "Oh! I do, I do. We came in and I said 'Hey, we should go for a swim in the canals next to the plaza!' But *you* said 'Pinkie, we can't go swimming in the canals. They don't ever filter that water. Plus I think it's illegal.' And then *I* said, 'oh it's not illegal, silly. Just frowned upon. Like sneaking into somepony's house at night and putting spiders in their bed as a practical joke.'"

"Umm... I'm pretty sure that's illegal too."

"It *is*?" Pinkie looked genuinely disappointed. "Maybe after the whole Elements of Harmony thing, when everypony got all sensitive. Thanks a lot, *Nightmare Moon*."

Applejack gave a nervous giggle. "Yeah. Right. I do remember that conversation... vaguely. I also remember those security guard ponies fishin' you out the water and throwin' ya out onto the street, rump first. O' course I went with ya, seein' as I wasn't about to let you wonder the Strip by yourself." The

earth pony gave Twilight and the others a glance. “Can’t remember where the rest o’ y’all were, though.”

Twilight hadn’t the faintest idea either. Though she’d remembered about Pinkie Pie getting thrown out as early as this morning, which meant the five of them must have somehow regrouped outside the hotel. The only question was what she, Rarity, and Rainbow Dash had done in the meantime.

“Hey,” said Applejack, “I got an idea. Maybe somepony else remembers seein’ us here last night. We musta been a real sight, after all.”

Twilight grinned. “Good thinking. We should ask around, especially to the staff who was working here last night.”

“Dang straight! We’ll start with the bartender.”

Oh my. Just the thought of going *near* a bar made Twilight want to wretch again. All those bottles behind the counter... and that smell. She couldn’t even bear to think about it. “I think I’d rather try somewhere else,” she said. “After all, we still have Rainbow’s room key to investigate.”

Rainbow got very quiet after that. In fact, the usually smug and candid pegasus had been largely keeping to herself all morning. Twilight noticed her drooping eyes and instantly regretted bringing up the key. “Don’t worry, Rainbow,” she said with a grin. “We’ll get to the bottom of all this. I’m sure it will all end up being one big misunderstanding.”

Rainbow Dash was quiet for about two seconds too long. “Yeah.” She sighed. “I’m sure we will.”

“Well, girls, why don’t we split up?” That was Rarity, who galloped to the front of the pack and spun around to face them. “Twilight and Rainbow Dash can investigate the room key, while the rest of us ask around at the bar and in the shopping plaza.” The unicorn had thrown on a simple red-and-green gown before leaving the hotel, in order to hide the little critter on her haunch.

The others mouthed their agreement. And Twilight quickly found herself riding up the elevator, standing next to a very uneasy pegasus.

She didn't like seeing her friend like this. It was only now starting to hit her just what blacking out meant. However she tried to spin it, the truth was that, for a night, Twilight had *not been in control*. A foreign presence had taken her over, and probably driven her to do things she would never have done willingly. She had once heard the word "gone" used to describe a terribly drunk pony. Now it finally made sense. Last night, Twilight Sparkle had been *gone*. Something else had been in control. Seeing the end result, and realizing just a few of the stupid decisions she'd made, brought with it an almost otherworldly sense of strangeness. It felt like she was piecing together somepony else's night instead of her own. It was... a little scary.

And as uneasy as Twilight felt right now, she knew Rainbow felt worse.

She placed a hoof on her friend's back and smiled her warmest smile. "Don't worry, Rainbow. We'll find out what really happened soon enough. You'll see: the truth won't be half as bad as what your imagination can come up with."

Dash's eyes dropped, and she stared at the floor for several long moments. "Twilight, what if I..."
Silence.

"What if you what?"

"Did something really stupid. I mean, I don't think I would..." she tapered off. "But what if I did? It's sure starting to look that way. I wouldn't be able to look in a mirror without cringing. What would I say? What would *you* say? And what about our friends, what would they all think? I'd be so ashamed, and this is not how I wanted... oh man..."

A glint, just the tiniest hint of a tear, appeared beneath the pegasus' eye.

"I can't even look you in the eye right now, Twilight."

Without even bothering to think about it, Twilight lowered her neck and forced the pegasus to make eye contact with her. Rainbow shrunk away. It was unsettling. She had *never* seen her so self-confident friend like this before.

“Listen to me, Rainbow,” she began. “Regardless of what happened last night, you’re here with your friends. You’ve got *nothing* to be ashamed about. At least not with us. We are with you no matter what. And if you did do something you regret last night – if you’re really feeling that beat-up about it – then I’ll tell you what to do. You go up to your friends, bow your head, and submit. To a Great. Big. Hug.”

She was impressed at how hard Dash tried to keep the smile off her face. The pegasus lasted three, maybe four seconds. But after that, her willpower broke, and she grinned like a stupid dog. “Th... thanks, Twilight. I should have known not to worry about what you’d say.”

The elevator doors parted then, and they stepped out into the lavish fourth-floor corridor of the Veneightian Hotel and Casino.

“Room 4652,” Dash muttered. “Four six five two. Should be to our left.” As the numbers along the hallway climbed, she seemed to grow more and more tense.

They were there before they knew it. Dash stopped and froze in front of Room 4652. “Oh man.”

Twilight took position beside her. “Remember. Whatever happens, your friends are with you. No matter what.”

“I know, I know, just... Bah. It’s now or never.” A look of steel determination appeared on Rainbow Dash’s face. With a quick glance at Twilight, she knocked on the door.

Ten seconds later, it opened. Slowly. Standing on the other side was a teal-coated pegasus with a neatly cropped, coffee-brown mane. He wore a pair of rimmed glasses very low on his snout, a well-trimmed goatee under his chin, and a short bathrobe over his chest. Twilight shot a peak at his cutie mark: an open logbook and quill.

The stallion studied Rainbow Dash with equal parts confusion and weary-eyed exhaustion. Rainbow stared back. They shared a long and very awkward pause.

“Umm.” Rainbow dropped her eyes, and took to pawing at the floor. “Hey there.” More silence.

All in the span of a few seconds, Rainbow glanced around for a chance to stall, found nothing, and gave up with a heavy sigh of reluctance. "I... don't suppose you remember me from last night?"

The teal pegasus blinked. "I've never seen you in my life."

"You haven't?" She sounded far too relieved to hear that. "You sure? I wasn't here? I mean, you're completely, one-hundred-percent sure that you don't remember seeing me here, *at all*?"

"Sorry," said the pegasus.

Twilight had to admit that she was relieved to hear it as well. The room key had turned into another empty lead to finding Fluttershy, but at least Rainbow Dash didn't have to worry about making any irreversible mistakes the night before. Twilight wasn't sure what her friend would have done if this pony *had* remembered her.

She was so busy in her relief that she didn't notice the teal-colored pegasus turn in her direction. Thus, his words took her completely by surprise.

"I definitely remember you, though, Twilight Sparkle!"

His name was Figure.

He was an accountant out of Fillydelphia. As he explained to Twilight and Dash, he was here with a group of friends, but they'd all ended up spending the night in some other pony's room. That meant he had the place to himself. He'd been preparing breakfast when the two of them arrived. The eggs were still in the frying pan when he invited them in, filling the room with the delicious scent of oil and melting cheese. He offered to cook some up for them. Twilight wanted to decline, but Rainbow Dash pounced on the opportunity for free food. He seemed eager to talk about himself as he served them each a steaming plate of scrambled eggs and cheese.

But he was much more eager to talk about Twilight Sparkle.

“My *stars*, but you should have seen it,” he said between mouthfuls of egg. “You were tearing up the floor last night as if you were the only one there. Dancing on four hooves, then two, then on the countertop, then on a barstool. You tried to shuffle on the stool... didn’t work out so well. You cranked your hooves pretty impressively, though. Then you started asking ponies to teach you how to dougie. And near the end you did this one move where you backed your rump all up over some colt... then next thing I knew, you were doing the same thing with a mare.”

Rainbow Dash chortled so hard that bits of chewed-up egg went flying all over Figure’s table. If the male pegasus minded, he kept it to himself. Twilight, however, could only absently run a hoof through her plate. All her appetite had left her the moment he started talking. She sighed. “I am... so embarrassed.”

“No way, Twilight!” said Figure with a chuckle. “You looked like you were having the time of your life out there. Everypony was watching you. You were crazy, alright, but you were having a blast. Truth be told, I admired you. You were just so... fearless.”

They did call it liquid courage for a reason. But it didn’t make sense. A single liquid rainboom couldn’t have affected her and her friends that badly... could it?

“How much did I drink, exactly?”

“A *lot*.” Figure chuckled. “Well, come to think of it I only actually saw you drink two shots. But you were claiming that you’d had twelve, or thirteen... you were actually kind of proud that you’d lost count. Something about how it was exactly what the book told you not to do.”

Dash snickered again. “Twilight, off book? I wish I could remember *that!*”

“Still, drunk ponies tend to exaggerate,” continued the teal pegasus. “And if you’d actually had twelve or thirteen shots, *well*, I would be bloody impressed to see you standing here right now. I thought for sure that you were passing out when they played *Shots*, and you took one every time Lil’ Colt told you to. You were lucky. The bartender was just giving you water shots at that point.”

Twilight could only stare at her plate. Dancing on tables, and with *mares*? Making such a

spectacle of herself, in public? And she didn't even know what a 'dougie' was! It felt so out of character that she almost doubted it could have really been her. Some other pony had taken her identity. Some other pony had done all those things, just to ruin her reputation. *This* was what the book must have meant by waking up to a morning full of regret...

"I just hope Celestia doesn't hear about this, or I'll get banished for sure," she muttered under her breath.

At that, Figure broke into another fit of laughter. "Oh man. That is *so* Twilight!"

And that was another thing. It made her feel uncomfortable beyond words to have some pony talking about her as if they were old friends, when for all intents and purposes she'd just met him *this morning*.

She tried her best not to let it slip into her voice. "If you don't mind me asking, how exactly do you know my name?"

"You're kidding?" The teal pegasus chuckled. "I think everypony in this hotel knows your name, considering you climbed onto a barstool and declared yourself Twilight Sparkle, Queen-Beyond-the-Wall. I still have no idea what that means, but it sounds pretty awesome."

Twilight slammed her head against the table. And kept it there.

Rainbow Dash, who'd eagerly wolfed down her second breakfast, was now able to laugh *without* spraying egg all over the room. "Oh, Twilight... I should have known you'd be a crazy drunk. Classic. I have to ask, though, Figure, did you see anypony else there with her last night? We're trying to find our friend, you see."

"Of course," said Figure, pausing for a moment to mull it over. "There were two of them with her. Fluttershy, I think her name was. And Ruby."

At that, Twilight's head shot up. "Wait. You saw Fluttershy?"

“Sure, she was there last night. Sober as a church pony, of course. She didn’t dance much. Tried to convince you not to panic, that the roof *wasn’t* on fire. I don’t think she realized it was part of the song. Once things got out of hand with you, though, it was Fluttershy who convinced you to leave.”

So they had definitely left the Veneightian together, at least.

Figure kept going. “Heh, heh. It was pretty funny, actually. You really wanted to stay and finish your, *ahem*... ‘magic dance’, you called it. Fluttershy and Ruby had to drag you out.”

Twilight blinked. “Ruby? Who is that?”

“You know, your other friend who... stars, maybe I’m remembering wrong. Either way, it was Fluttershy who got you out. Didn’t see you here again last night.”

Twilight started to reason through what he had said. If they left the casino with Fluttershy in tow, then that meant she must have gotten separated at one of the other hotels. Or at least somewhere on the Strip. At least two more drinks in the Veneightian. If they were already that far gone...

Ruby. Who was Ruby? He must have meant Rarity. In a place as loud as a dance floor, it was easy for voices to get drowned out. Still, unless Applejack and the others had managed to find something, it seemed they had exhausted this lead.

And then Twilight remembered why they had come here in the first place. “So,” she said, “if I left with my friends, and you never even saw Rainbow Dash, then how did we end up with your room key last night?”

Figure shrugged. “Stars, I don’t know. It isn’t my key.”

“But you just said-”

“I was here in the Veneightian,” he started. “But I wasn’t staying in this room. My friends and I had a suite on the second floor. Whoever was renting this room checked out early this morning, and the hotel comped us up.”

Silence. It took a moment for that to sink in. Then Rainbow Dash's eyes shrunk down to the size of pinpricks. "Wait, what?"

"Whoever gave you that room key must have had it before we did."

And just like that, the cyan pegasus' night became a mystery once again.

"Twilight, we have to check with the front desk," said Rainbow, her voice on the edge of panic. "They've got to have a record of who was here last night. They can tell us who gave me the key. Maybe the pony who did it knows where Fluttershy is."

It was a tempting notion, but Twilight knew it wouldn't work. "The hotel won't give us that kind of information. They have to respect the privacy of their clients."

"Privacy shmivacy. I *have* to know who-"

They ran into Applejack, Rarity, and Pinkie almost perfectly on cue as they trotted across the main lobby. "Learn anything?" Applejack asked.

"That I'm an idiot," said Twilight, too quickly. "And that whoever was staying in Room 4653 checked out early this morning. How about you? Did you have better luck than us?"

The earth pony shook her head sadly. "A few dealers remember me and Rainbow playin' some blackjack last night. Losin', mostly. Security asked us to leave after Rainbow shushed me because I was, *ahem...*" she glared at the pegasus. "Makin' her lose count."

Rainbow shrugged. "What? It's a foolproof method."

"We ran into some ponies who remembered me, too!" Pinkie said with a bounce and a cheerful giggle.

“Yeah, the very same colts who threw ya out last night. We gave ‘em the slip, though.”

“Other than that, nopony remembers seeing us.” Rarity glanced knowingly at the purple unicorn. “Though they all seem to remember you, Twilight Sparkle. Did you ever end up learning how to, *ahem*, dougie, my dear?”

Twilight felt her cheeks reddening again. She passed it off with a giggle. “Yeah, let’s not talk about that.”

They’d come to the Veneightian with a slew of questions. And so far they had managed to answer... well, none of them. They still didn’t know where Dash had gotten the key. They still didn’t know where the casino chips had come from, and if AJ and Dash had lost all their bits here, it was becoming less and less likely that she’d like the answer when she got it. They still didn’t know where Fluttershy was either. And worse, they had no idea where they’d gone to after the Veneightian.

“Well, we have to keep looking,” Twilight declared. “There were a few other hotels Pinkie wanted to visit. We probably ended up at some of them last night. The Four Seasons, the Baylagio, the Mirage...” *And the Maynn*. But Twilight wanted to avoid showing their faces in the Maynn, if at all possible.

The others mumbled their agreement, and after a bit more discussion, they decided to head out in the direction of the Baylagio.

The voice stopped them mere inches clear of the door.

“Sonofa...” The voice was male, and a deep baritone, with an accent somewhat similar to Applejack’s, if only a *tad* bit smoother. “Is that...? Shoot, it sure is, clear as the morning sun. It’s Rainbow the Roller. And here I thought I’d never again have the pleasure.”

The five ponies spun around to get a look at the speaker. All except Rainbow Dash, who could only stop short of the door, freezing as her cheeks turned crimson.

Twilight felt the urge to scratch her mane when she saw him. Copper-colored coat, charcoal mane, tinted sunglasses, a moustache, a lit cigar... by the stars, he seemed familiar. And then she got a look at his flank, and it hit her. It was the poker player from last night in Celestia's Palace! The earth pony with the ace-of-spades cutie mark!

Something else about him was familiar as well. Too familiar.

He was wearing Applejack's hat.