

## Chapter Four: A Point Becomes A Line

By Thanqol

"Shouldn't we inform Fluttershy?" I asked as we walked together through the overcast Ponyville streets, "She will be going down entirely the wrong track with Derpy."

"Whoever had a mind to set up this scheme is no doubt watching the law enforcement exceedingly closely to be sure that their scheme has worked. At the first sign of the police showing true suspicion - and they **will** show it in their blundering way - she will go to ground and the trail will become cold."

"I see. It still feels wrong to deceive her," I said, but didn't look Rarity in the eye as I said it. I understood her point but it still grated.

"Trust me, Rainbow Dash, I know exactly how Fluttershy's investigation will progress and she is in no danger of humiliating herself. Fluttershy's suspicions will fall on Pinkie eventually, when she is through questioning Derpy. By then we should have a clearer idea of what's going on."

I am lead to believe that the process of questioning Derpy about her whereabouts the previous evening was one of the most frustrating and confusing moments in Fluttershy's life.

"But what concerns me here is motive," Rarity was saying, "There is something I am missing there. Why go after a powerful fashion guru such as Magnet? If the intent is to provoke outrage towards Pinkamina, there are surely more easy targets than a River Dragon."

"Perhaps she had a grudge against both?"

"Perhaps. We need to gather more data," Rarity said, stopping outside Sugar Cube Corner, "And by we, I mean you."

"What?"

"Well, first off my face is known amongst these parts - who could not know it? - and secondly, Pinkie Pie has not yet met you and I am unsure if I want to be in the room when she finds this out. Go on in, have a conversation, you're a smart girl, Dash, you'll figure it out." Rarity gave me an encouraging clap on the shoulder, and I winced as it made my wing ache. Without another word, she turned on heel and walked back towards Baker Street, leaving me outside the glorified gingerbread cottage.

I took a breath to calm a trepidation I did not yet know the source of and walked into the bakery.

It was astounding, really, how much sugar was in the air of the place. It made my teeth positively

ache just being in the room. There was only one other customer, a hunched old gray mare in a coat who was using a walker to slowly navigate the store.

"Excuse me?" I asked tentatively, and then my face was full of pink.

"The cab driver? Are you *kidding* me? That's just silly! You know what would have made the story better? If the detective was the killer! I think I read a story like that one time! It was called Batmare! No, wait, that wasn't it," the incoherent mess of pink moved back a bit and it's voice slowed down a touch as confusion overtook it. "Flight Club? But he wasn't a detective! Ooh! This is hard!"

"Good... afternoon?" I said to the dementedly pink earth pony who had sprung up in front of me.

"Hi! I'm Pinkie Pie!" She said. "Said" did not capture half the sheer bubbly enthusiasm the creature put into every syllable, but for the sake of my narrative it shall have to do.

"Rainbow Dash," I said. While I was normally polite enough to offer a hoof to shake, I was almost afraid if I did so I'd never see that leg again.

"Oh! Are you new, Rainbow Dash!? I used to know everypony in Ponyville, and then Ponyville started getting so big and I can't keep track and even when my life is one ongoing party there's still more party than I can fill all by my Pinkie-ownsomes..."

I was beginning to suspect that this creature was the one behind this whole event if only because she seemed insane enough for it. Or perhaps I was hoping she was because if she was in gaol I wouldn't have to listen to this purposeless rambling.

"Miss Pie," I said, attempting to reassert control over the situation, "Did you deliver cupcakes to Mr. Magnet the other day?"

"Stephen? Oh yeah, he gets his order weekly!" Pinkie said, bouncing.

"And you deliver yourself?"

"Oh no, I can't be in *nine* places at once, silly," Pinkie Pie said, and I was struck by how specific that phrasing was, "Some I mail, some the other ponies here deliver!"

"I see. And the ones you mail...?"

"I just put up a sign and an orange and Derpy comes and gets them!"

"You don't see her do this herself?"

"It's best not to bother her when she's working," Pinkie said, face becoming utterly serious for a moment.

The execution of the crime was becoming obvious to me at this point, so I decided to switch tack. "Do you have any enemies, Pinkie Pie?" I asked.

"What? *Enemies?* Are you coco in the loco?" Pinkie said, disregarding the unwritten rules of personal space to stare directly in my eyes for evidence of my insanity. Fortunately the sound of a door slamming behind us gave me the chance I needed to back up a few steps. I silently thanked the old mare for picking that moment to leave.

"I'm sorry I asked. I don't think there's much else to say," I said, backing towards the door.

"Okie-dokie-locie! I'll have you a party as soon as I can, Rainbow Dash, and that's a Pinkie Promise!"

She started going through some ritual swear that seemed to involve promises of defenestration and self mutilation, so I hurried out the door. I actually felt fairly good about how that had gone, all told – I had discovered what was no doubt the means the criminal had used to sneak the poison into Magnet's home. She had simply picked up a crate intended for Derpy, taken it to Magnet's house and claimed she was the mailpony. Rarity would surely be impressed by my findings.

Just as I had that thought, Rarity came around a corner surrounded by a cloud of levitating muffins.

"Rarity?" I asked in surprise, and immediately found the muffins thrust into my hooves.

"While you were being so good as to distract Miss Pie, I went and gathered a selection of muffins from the mail dock, where the prankster no doubt acquired them," Rarity said as she swept past. I began to follow her, tottering under the weight of the muffins. "I left money, of course, but the principle aim is to test these muffins to see if they are also poisoned. Did you discover anything while you were in there, Rainbow Dash?"

I opened my mouth, then closed it again. "No," I muttered.

"Oh well, you'll get them next time," she said, and although I could see she was trying to be nice I found the gesture quite condescending.

"Would you excuse me, please? I'd like to go for a walk to clear my head."

"Of course. I believe I've got a solid idea of the case in my mind by this point and it won't take too much longer to crack," Rarity said breezily, taking the muffins back from me.

“Yeah, yeah,” I muttered, and walked down the road.

In retrospect, I do not know what had gotten into me in that moment. This was Rarity’s area of specialisation; she had trained her entire life to be a Detective, and I had barely stumbled across the concept yesterday. If, say, Rarity entered the Best Young Fliers competition and showed me up my grievances might be legitimate, but that seemed to be what I was hoping to do to her.

Now that I think about it, though, that wasn’t quite the case at all. I wasn’t hoping to show Rarity up; I was hoping to impress her. To demonstrate that I could at least be of use, at least be a helpful assistant, rather than a puppet sent on distraction missions to ask questions she already knew the answers to. The idea that was cutting at me wasn’t envy, it was insecurity.

These brooding thoughts distracted me as I walked, and soon I had lost myself in the simple momentum of putting one hoof in front of the other. Hours passed and the sun began to set, and I found myself walking the dark streets near Sweet Apple Acres. So caught up in both my own angst over my failure to help unravel this mystery which so captivated Rarity, and my clumsy attempts to come up with some flash of revelation that would solve the case, I did not notice the silhouettes in the shadows before me until it was too late.

I could have recognized those shapes anywhere: Applejack, and her brother, Big MacIntosh. I stopped, picked off my coin pouch, and cast it to the ground before their hooves. “There’s your money, Applejack. Just like I said,” I said, backing up a bit, “I don’t want any trouble.”

“That’s too bad, sugarcube,” Applejack said, stepping forwards into the light, ignoring the coins, “Because trouble found you,”

I lunged into the air to flee these landlocked Earth Ponies, but I was instantly caught by a lasso that wrapped around my legs, pulled in a direction that made all my horizontal momentum vertical, and slammed into the mud. All the breath exploded from my body, my eyes rolled randomly and my brain was scrambled.

I will not bore the reader with detailed description of the experience; suffice to say I was too dazed to make out shapes or, indeed, more than slightly distorted words. What I did hear was a third voice, without any of that Apple family twang to it, shout “Enough!”

The orange mare standing over me paused.

The word “Enough,” was repeated but this time lower, with more menace, and I could hear the ponies grudgingly step back. I raised my head to see my savior but could not make out more than a jagged, blurred outline. When I heard the voice continue, “She has to be conscious for this next part,” I became considerably less optimistic about the nature of my rescuer.

A voice, low and raspy, whispered into my ear, "You're new in town, so we're going to be friendly about this. Give up playing detective. Go live a safe, quiet life and we won't have any problems."

The voice moved away.

I briefly saw Applejack standing over me, saying "An' you can keep yer stinkin' money!" and she shoved the coin purse into my mouth, like an apple in a pig. I almost choked on it and caught a last glimpse of her retreating tail as they left me there in the street.

Now, here I must confess to the reader a vice of mine I didn't have the mind to confess to Rarity on our first meeting. I never give up. After that experience, the last thing I had in mind was a "Safe, quiet life". I wanted my life to be one big problem that they and all their kind would be drawn into. Perhaps a rash decision, particularly under the circumstances, but I have never been noted for my rational forethought.

I eventually untangled myself from the rope, got to my feet, set my jaw, and started walking back to my accommodations at Baker Street. I was driven by a quiet resolve, and a kind of fury that they had thought that I would bow to their demands. I walked for thirty minutes as cool and composed as any pony past or future. However, the moment I opened the door to my lodgings, my legs decided that this was close enough and I collapsed to the ground.

The motion was made doubly ungraceful for the fact it happened directly in front of Rarity, who was at her workbench with the muffins. She let out a shocked gasp and dragged me over to the bathtub, where she began pouring hot water and applying gentle care to my bruises. Floating brushes expertly began to extract the mud that had coated me from my fall. Some part of me knew that this was the exact kind of girlish spa treatment I had sworn to avoid, but I did not find it within me to resist.

Instead, I decided to focus the mind by making conversation, on what I hoped would be a light topic. "That picture," I said, indicating a picture of Rarity alongside a purple unicorn. "Who is she?"

"Oh, old friend of mine. Twilight Sparkle," Rarity said, focusing on my mane, "Knew her a few years back. Unfortunately... well."

"Well?" I pressed slightly, for the first time hearing Rarity unsure about something.

"Well, I made her a dress. Her exact designs and specifications. And oh, stars and sequins, it was hideous. The ugliest thing I'd ever made. But she loved it, loved everything about it, and I never had the heart to object. She was such a good friend, too, but I haven't spoken to her in a year or so. Something about her studies."

“I hardly believe you are capable of making anything ugly,”

“Well, the vast majority of my work is absolutely stunning,” she said, picking up a hairdryer. I suddenly realized that I had recently, silently, accepted the offer to become a piece of her ‘work’. A mild panic struck me.

“Tell me you haven’t done anything – well, anything –“

“Don’t worry, Rainbow Dash,” Rarity said with a grin, “I believe this is going to be the best piece I’ve ever done.”

“You’ve just been waiting for a chance, haven’t you?” I accused, slightly wildly, “One moment of weakness and, BLAM! Makeover!”

“You make it sound like it’s going to be painful!” said Rarity in mock horror, producing a variety of sharp bladed instruments from her bag.

I must, again, point out that under normal circumstances have resisted this kind of girlish treatment more than I did. You must keep in mind the trials of my day before you judge me harshly.

But relent I did and, it was with greatest fear that I turned my gaze to look into the mirror Rarity presented me at the end of the piece.

“I look the same,” I said in surprise. The mud was gone, a few feathers straightened, my hooves less worn and chipped, but otherwise the same.

“My dear Rainbow Dash,” Rarity said, laughing in delight to see my expression, “What would I change?”

I was rendered speechless by that.

“I find you a most interesting case, Rainbow Dash. A Study in Rainbows, as it were. Virtually every fashion and style has gone through my mind in turn – and be sure, if you continue to be such an agreeable assistant you will see some of them – but none of them remotely compare to the basic material. I feel like any dress I would inflict on you would be to promote my fashion career rather than your character.”

“Surely not!” I protested, unwilling in the extreme to accept such obviously fanciful flattery.

“Hmph! I would argue this in circles if I had time but I believe Detective Fluttershy is on her way here and we shall be interrupted shortly.”

“Fluttershy?” I said, and immediately remembered the case of the day which had slipped from my weary mind. “Oh, of course. How do you know?”

“Elementary, Rainbow Dash. The standard chemical test she would have performed on the moustache takes six hours to confirm as Poison Joke, and immediately after receiving that conclusion from her lab she will rush down here to inform me that this, paired with Derpy’s alibi, puts the lantern of suspicion on Pinkie Pie.”

“You know this case before it has even happened!”

“Why yes. And I am nursing a theory about the true culprit’s identity. It was a puzzler at first, but I believe this will all be dispensed with by noon tomorrow. A pity, for a moment there I thought there would be a mystery to it –“ Rarity was saying.

Right on cue, there was a very gentle knock on the door.

“Come in, Detective!” Rarity called.

There was another knock, slightly firmer. I glanced at Rarity and then opened the door.

A small white bunny in a police uniform hopped in and offered a scroll to Rarity.

“Officer Angel? What happened to Fluttershy?” Angel thrust the note at her again. Rarity picked it up, glanced it over, and her eyes widened in shock. Wordlessly, she passed it to me.

I cleared my throat and read it out loud.

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MY DEAR FRIEND RARITY

I’m very sorry about the shouting, but something important has happened. The lab proved that Stephen Magnet’s moustache was destroyed by a dose of Poison Joke. Derpy’s alibi is rocktight; she was attending a crowd scene all last night and has dozens of witnesses. We’re currently looking at the baker as the potential poisoner –

I stopped reading. “Why, Rarity, it all is happening exactly as you said!”

She gestured for me to continue

- But another situation has come up that requires urgent attention. Sapphire Shores, the Pony of Pop, has been the victim of a similar attack. While reports are yet unconfirmed, I believe she has also been exposed to the Poison Joke. I fear the two are related. I would ask your help. If

that's okay with you, I don't want to be a bother.

Yours faithfully, FLUTTERSHY

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"Hm, she did not write sorry that last time," I said looking at the final capitalisation. "Perhaps she is becoming more confident?"

Angel pointed.

"Ah, of course," I said, "She wrote her apology on the envelope, and apologised for forgetting."

"But Dash! You see what is happening here!" Rarity said, pressing her face close against mine. She looked panicked, "Somepony is attacking fashion ponies, one by one! And they are moving far faster than I expected! Something must have tipped them off!"

"Well –" I was slightly nervous to explain my run in with the Apple family, but Rarity didn't even give me the chance.

"After Shores, they are no doubt going to make an attempt on Hoity Toity – and if they are moving this fast, chances are they will make it at his appearance the Equestrian Art Exhibition tomorrow!" Rarity said, pacing so rapidly I could scarcely keep track of her, "And after Hoity Toity the only remaining member of the Fab Four is Photo Finish! And if we don't stop them in time..."

"Rarity!" I shouted, breaking her out of her trance. "There's a time for analysis, and there's a time for speed," I unfurled my wings, "And we've got *plenty* of speed."

Rarity stared for a moment, then smiled. "I knew I kept you around for a reason, Rainbow Dash."