Rarity stood on the blackened floorboards, completely unconcerned with the ash and soot that was collecting on her coat. She stared around her with unbelieving eyes at the bombed-out wreckage that used to be her shop. Smoky walls and melted tools, charred ends of fabric bolts and broken furniture. She stubbornly choked back a sob as she set a dummy back upright on its stand, the metal burnished and warped by the heat of the flames.

*My dream…* she thought sadly. Had it been a candle falling over in the night that had caused this? Nopony knew, and she silently thanked Celestia that neither she nor Sweetie Belle had been hurt, but the damage was just as much to her heart as it was to the Boutique.

Twilight had arrived quickly with a group of unicorns, but the best they could manage was to contain the fire while water was fetched from the lake reservoir. Twilight was extremely skilled, and she had managed to keep the house intact and structurally sound—though at the cost of sacrificing everything in the shop. Now, twenty-four hours later, the Carousel Boutique had an ugly hole in its side, a blackened, monstrous gash—and Rarity’s soul could empathize.

She had sunk so much time, effort, and money into her latest order: a full set of ball gowns for Canterlot nobles. Her entire savings had been wagered on buying the best materials and accessories she could get her hooves on. She knew the bounty she would reap if they were finished, but now this tragedy left her on the border of destitute. Without bits to rebuild, she would never finish even one of those gowns in time, and without finishing at least one of those gowns, she would never get the bits she needed to rebuild her dream.

Worse, there wasn’t anypony she could go to for help. Her family was, as per the norm, on vacation, and even if they had bits to spare, they wouldn’t hear about her tragedy for weeks. None of her friends were able to assist. Applejack had enough trouble keeping the farm solvent through the unpredictable growing seasons, and the other girls had never really been involved in business—or concerned with money at all, really. Though they would gladly do so if they could, none of them had much money to give. Even going to the Princess herself would likely be a wash. While Celestia would certainly be compassionate and understanding, she wouldn’t be able to show that kind of favoritism, not even towards the Element of Generosity.

The bank was her last resort, but she had gone to them in the past to get the bits to upgrade her equipment, and she had put the shop itself up as collateral on the loan. Without even that physical token, there would be no help forthcoming.

Rarity began to sob quietly as she slumped to her haunches on the ash-coated floor. She didn’t even have her couch anymore… What would she do now? She would have to find some sort of work to build her funds back up, by which time she would surely have had to give up the Boutique—give up her home.

Her thoughts turned bitter as she wrestled with the unfairness of it all. She, who had given so much to others, was to receive nothing. Well, at least now there wasn’t a conflict, because she had nothing left to give away, nothing to be generous with. She would have to bite and scratch to try to reclaim her own dream, even though the mere thought of such ruthlessness made her stomach turn.

She gasped and turned at the sound of a stallion politely clearing his throat outside the shop. She quickly swiped the back of her hooves over her eyes, hoping to make herself at least partially presentable, but knew that it was likely a lost cause at this point. She walked slowly out of the shop and onto the grass. “Yes?”

The stallion tipped his fedora to her, an old-fashioned gesture that would have cheered the designer’s heart under any other circumstances. “I would say ‘good morning,’ Miss Rarity, but I think ‘I’m sorry’ will have to suffice for now.”

Rarity nodded. “I understand, and thank you. What may I do for you?”

He shook his head. “Rather, the other way around, Miss. You don’t know me, but my name is Blue Chip. I’m an investor in Canterlot, and I just heard about—about this,” he said, waving a hoof at the damaged Boutique. “I want to help.”

She smiled dismissively at him. “That’s a very thoughtful gesture, Blue Chip. I appreciate the sentiment.”

He said nothing, simply reaching into his saddlebag and pulling out a piece of paper, which he passed to her. Rarity read the slip, its markings declaring it to be a banker’s check, and felt her legs give out at the sight of the number on it. She slumped back onto her haunches once again, this time in shock and amazement. “But,” she protested, “that’s exorbitant! It’s *outrageous*!”

Blue Chip smiled. “It’s a gift, Miss Rarity.”

Tears returned to Rarity’s eyes, this time fueled by relief and joy. “But—*why*?”

“A few years back, while I was still in Canterlot University, I was at home for summer break, here in Ponyville. My sister was just finishing up high school and was all set to go to her senior prom. We were nothing like wealthy, but the whole family pitched in to try to come up with enough money to buy her a fantastic dress, which we commissioned you to make.”

Comprehension dawned on Rarity. “I remember,” she whispered. “Your family said that they wanted something simple, but elegant. They—they made every request to try to keep it as cheap as possible…”

He nodded. “Yes, they did. In the end, it still wasn’t enough, and the money had to go to other necessities. We told you to stop making it, that we had to cancel the order. Do you remember what you told us?”

She merely nodded, unable to form words around the lump in her throat.

“You said that you enjoyed working on it so much that you just *had* to see it worn, and that we shouldn’t worry about the expense. You said the creation was reward enough and insisted that she take it for nothing. Not a single bit—even *after* you had ignored their instructions, making it better than it needed to be.”

Rarity’s eyes closed as a tear worked its way down her cheek.

“You had no way of knowing, but that simple act probably changed my sister’s life. She felt like a princess in it, and it gave her the courage to ask her crush to the dance. Now they’re married with two foals and live in Manehatten.”

He took a step closer to Rarity, kneeling down to her height. “You see,” he said, “*that’s* what I’m giving to. As payment for a gift that couldn’t possibly have a price, and as an investment in the future. Everypony knows that you’re one of the most generous ponies around, Miss Rarity. Even in Canterlot, your name is well known, and everypony agrees that you’d not only give the cloak off your back to a needy pony, but you’d also make him a spare one just because you could.”

He stood back up, gently pulling Rarity to her hooves. “You’ve given ponies dreams, Miss Rarity. It’s only right that somepony give you one back.”

As she stood back up, she threw herself onto her benefactor, hugging him tightly. “I—I just don’t know what to say,” she gasped, tearing up as her breathing got more rapid. The tensions, emotions, and stresses of the day were swimming inside her, overwhelming her senses and making it hard to think straight.

“Thank you.” She pulled her head back to look into his eyes—his deep, violet eyes—and gave him a kiss on the forehead. “Thank you,” she recited as his ears lay back modestly. “Thank you,” she whispered as she kissed the surprised stallion on the muzzle.

“Oh, n-no, it’s my pleasure,” Blue Chip stammered, blushing fiercely from the touch of the mare’s tongue on his lips and leaning away as much as Rarity’s grasp would allow.

She refused to release him, though. She felt as though somepony else had taken over her body and she was a mere spectator for what was to follow. “Would you like to come in for a bit?” she asked quietly, indicating the house at the rear of the Boutique with a nod of her head. “Everything but the shop is quite safe and undamaged, I assure you.”

Blue Chip stared in confusion, pulling against her. “I—Rarity, I don’t think I quite understand what’s going on here…”

Something in the back of Rarity’s emotion-addled mind was screaming at her, but she couldn’t make sense of anything at the moment. “I’m not sure I do, either,” she admitted, “but I think I’d like to find out. Won’t you come in for a *proper* thanks?”

He started, finally jerking free of her grasp. “Wait,” he said, scowling, “is *that* what this is about?”

Rarity blinked, rather confused herself. “What what is about, darling?”

“You’re doing”—he flailed a hoof around, lost for words—“*this* because you want to *thank* me? Isn’t that just a *bit* extreme?”

“I—I…” The haze fell away from Rarity’s mind as she realized that she had been trying to seduce the poor stallion. “Oh, oh, Blue Chip, I’m so sorry. I don’t know what I was thinking. I swear, I don’t normally do this sort of thing…”

He gave her a sympathetic smile. “It’s okay. I’m sure this is all a bit overwhelming.”

She looked up at him. “I just don’t have anything else left. There’s nothing I can say ‘thank you’ with.”

“Ah,” he said, nodding. “I think I get it. Rarity, you don’t let ponies give you things very often, do you?”

“… let?”

“When somepony tries to give you something, you feel like you have to return the favor, right?”

“I—I suppose I do,” she mused distantly, grimacing at the memory of how she had gone to such lengths to debase herself before royalty for merely offering her a room to stay in.

“Rarity, sometimes being generous means letting others have their way. It means accepting a gift you don’t feel like you deserve, or simply accepting somepony else’s favor without returning anything.”

“But—isn’t that rather selfish?” she countered. “Not that I haven’t been that before—Harmony knows I have—but it’s just taking. It feels… wrong.”

“Not always,” he said. “Sometimes, letting somepony else have the good feeling of giving a meaningful gift is a gift in itself.”

“Oh, well then,” she sighed. “I’ve made a proper foal of myself here.”

He smiled at her. “Don’t let it get you down; we all do things like that.” His smile turned slightly nervous. “I, uh—I don’t suppose you’d let me do one more thing for you, would you?”

“What did you have in mind?”

His ears flattened back again. “Would you allow me to buy you lunch? Your choice of restaurant.”

Rarity blinked at him. “Did you enjoy the kiss that much?”

“Uh, heh, yes,” Blue Chip muttered, his blush threatening to take over his entire coat.

She laughed quietly and winked at the stallion. “Well, you’d have to let me get cleaned up first, of course, but I think I could allow that. Because that’s just the *generous* thing to do.”