

My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic **The Cutie Mark Clash, Chapter 9**

Rarity strolled through the Ponyville streets, flaunting her Hoof of War more as an accessory to her luchadora's outfit. Allegedly she was looking for an opponent, but all the attention was... well, it was just too much for her to ignore for any reason. Whether everypony was struck by the fashion or waiting for her to find somepony, she figured any exposure was good. Okay, enough staring. A stunning image was worth a thousand words, but none of those words are actually going to say anything, so...

The designer sidled up to the nearest spectator. "If you **MUST** know, this sort of fashion **AND MORE** is **ALL** available at my very own Carous--"

Horns blared. Rarity gave a three-toned yelp at the sudden noise. Further, the mare she was addressing looked to the direction of the horns, was even more amazed at what she saw, and trot off to take a look. In fact, many of the ponies that had been giving Rarity her much-deserved attention now led themselves away.

Rarity boiled with anger a bit, her hooves separating from scuffling the pavement too hard. She quickly composed herself with a breath and clearing of her throat. This wasn't a big deal. She had nothing to do with this. In fact, this could be opportune. "Excuse me... pardon me... If you would be a doll... Coming... Coming **THROUGH!**" Rarity shoved herself through the last of the crowd to the front.

The horns continued to blare. It was at this point that Rarity noticed that the horns came from Canterlot royal guard ponies.

"Oh, no..."

There was a red carpet spread starting at where a chariot landed.

"Oh **NO...!**"

Flowers were being tossed along the carpet... some of the mares were swooning.

"No no no no no *no no no no...!*"

The horns died down, leaving a very awkward silence. Sheer dread and Pavlovian reaction rooted her to the spot at the object of her disdain walked to the end of the carpet, directly in front of her.

"Lady Rarity," Prince Blueblood addressed, "it has been far too long."

Rarity stammered, "*No it hasn't there is no such thing go away!!*" She quickly backed up, but was blocked off by the front of the crowd. The mares shoved her back where she was,

not letting her waste the prince's time.

Blueblood tittered, "Oh, Lady Rarity. I do apologize for how our previous encounter ended up. It is in light of that I propose something to you."

"I wouldn't accept any proposal from YOU even if it included chocolates! And jewelry... *and chocolate-coated jewelry!!*"

"Oh... are you STILL harboring that? I had no idea."

Rarity's eyes shrunk to a beady size and she uttered a few more syllables. "You had NO IDEA, all right! Just a horseshoe's throw from having NO CLUE, either!!"

Despite Rarity being more difficult than every mare Blueblood had ever met multiplied, he was peculiarly calm about it. "MUST you be so antagonistic, Lady Rarity? I'm proposing a contest!"

"I wouldn't BE so antagonistic if you didn't EARN it so mu- A contest?" Rarity finally took the moment to notice the Hoof of War on Blueblood's hooves. A royal guard carried over on his back a jewel-encrusted box. Blueblood used his magic to open the box and lift out of it a pair of boxing gloves. Blueblood raised his dukes, so to speak, magically holding the gloves in front of him while keeping his hooves on the ground. "Wait a moment. By 'competition,' you mean a fight? As in... hitting each other and inflicting pain sort of fighting?"

"If you MUST say it that way, then yes. It is as you say."

Rarity's lip trembled, giving away her eagerness. She yelped, "YES! No. *Wait!* This is too suspicious! Who are you trying to impress? What is so important that you'd risk harm to your being *and I know very well you're averse to that sort of thing.* Where are all the ponies who would clearly object to seeing one of their own getting in a fight? Why me? *How can you be a prince when you are the nephew of a princess!?*"

Blueblood rolled his eyes, "Look if you're going to be-

"Oh, no." Rarity interrupted. "Oh, no no. You want a bottom line? Your behavior at the Grand Galloping Gala was disgraceful among disgraces, and I deserve MUCH better than having been on the receiving end. You OWE me the satisfaction, Prince Blueblood... and I am going to *take it!*" Rarity's waning patience exhausted as she stamped out the Hoof of War in front of all the mortified mares.

The moment simmered a bit, letting Blueblood know just how deep in he was. The newly attending Hayley hummed a bit before saying, "And the Hoof of War should be fully rooted... now."

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"HYAAAAA!!!" Rarity shouted and launched herself into Blueblood.

Blueblood yelped and rose a glove to block the incoming jump kick. On Rarity's landing, he managed to get the other glove around her for a throw behind him. When he finished the throw and turned around, he looked to Hayley. "Whose side are you ON?"

"Hm?" Hayley snapped to attention, "Erruh, I suppose I'm on YOUR side since you're in closer proximity, or perhaps because this is the side that you started on as of the start of this fight. Or perhaps this is Rarity's side because it's where she needs to go...? I know the standard Hoof of War size but perhaps it extended so perhaps the sides have extended and I am now standing closer to what can be considered Rarity's side!"

A moment of gawking.

"Oh, oh, you mean, ah, support. I can't take sides. I'm an officiator."

Blueblood took a moment too many to glare at Hayley, being unprepared to receive Rarity on her return attack. Rarity flipped forward, striking a hoof out and letting it fall on Blueblood's back. The prince was knocked flat on his stomach, losing his magical grip on the gloves for a few moments. Trying to get back up, he met Rarity's hoof again from a cartwheel kick. The stallion was propped back on his feet and almost ready to fight back when in that time Rarity had reared back and leapt with a buck that caught him right in the face. He rolled backwards on the ground a few yards.

"Oh ho *ho*, yes...!" Rarity swooned, "I think I've been harboring what you did all this time and let me tell you, this is *very* therapeutic!"

Blueblood picked himself up, this time being very aware of his surroundings. He let a huffy growl escape his throat. "So we're playing it THAT way, are we?" He held up his dukes as Rarity came in for another aggressive assault. He then let the gloves down as if arms hanging. "Come on, then..." he muttered.

Rarity came in with another hind hoof extended. When it seemed like the hit was all but scored, something happened. Rarity's hoof was a single iota of distance from Blueblood's back. Their coat hairs were touching. But at that very moment, one of Blueblood's boxing gloves raised fast enough to plow into Rarity and send her in the complete opposite direction. The actions were fast enough to come ahead of Blueblood's shout of "Cross Counter!"

Blueblood exhaled, seeing Rarity hit the ground and popping herself up. He said to her, "I HOPE you don't try doing THAT again for your OWN sake."

"Well!" Rarity snapped back, "I guess it WAS rather naïve of me to expect you to have no backbone at all. Even if ARE reserving it solely for a very ungentlemanly act..."

"Now hold it! YOU haven't exactly been a model of noble behavior yourself! You're the least ladylike pony I have EVER seen!"

"Hmph! You wouldn't know anything about that since you don't deserve that satisfaction! If every mare here knew the real you behind the face and the title, nopony would look at you twice!"

"Yeah, well... Your outfit is ridiculous!"

The crows gasped. As obscure as Rarity is in the wider Equestrian fashion circuit, she still had a fair number of friends and clientele in attendance that knew of her pride in her work.

Rarity narrowed her eye. "It... is... *on!*"

Blueblood regarded this proclamation with caution. Hopefully, it would cause her to be reckless like he intended with his goading. She's going to be more vicious either way... The sight of Rarity rearing back for a strike brought Blueblood back into the moment. In that time he had already learned to dread that setup and acted accordingly. In a swift movement he leapt from his location in front of Rarity. His charge ended with one of a series of rapid-fire punches with the left boxing glove, ending on a blow to the side with the right glove.

There was no way to tell if Rarity would get defensive after that assault, so Blueblood extended another punch to have at her. Rarity went in for an attack of her own and only ended up socked again by the glove at considerable reach.

Seeing how Blueblood's reach kept her from getting in close, Rarity opted to be the one making the counter. She kept light on her feet in anticipation of when Blueblood would realize he needed to attack. The noble did strike out with a punch and Rarity twisted to grab his foreleg. It was at that moment she remembered that he was using those gloves by magic and therefore had no foreleg to grasp. Rarity ended up falling forward onto her side. She looked up from her position to see Blueblood poised in the air above her. "Thunder..." And in a second he shot into the ground and drove the gloves into Rarity's side, "Bolt!" Rarity had never been struck by lightning before, but it couldn't have been far from this.

Blueblood landed on his hooves and exhaled. "I believe it is at this time that I can extend my hoof of mercy and allow you to back out of this fight. It is only fitting for a, ahem, *gentleman* like myself."

Rarity glared up at Blueblood, but ended up slowly extending her hoof. Despite the clear

bias, the crowd still gasped at the gesture. Blueblood smirked as he made the glove close around Rarity's hoof. And then his grasp on the glove caused him to fall forward when Rarity yanked him down. He let go of the glove too late and still fell face-first into a convenient light post while Rarity used the momentum to help herself on all fours. She twirled around to face her recovering opponent with a cry of "Ah-HA!"

Blueblood gnashed his teeth, "You've gone... and *squandered* your last chance!" He reared back and immediately launched forward which Rarity had not been expecting. He managed to land two side strikes but the third was caught in Rarity's hooves. He smirked at the possibility she might fall for the legless gloves again, but she was onto something else.

Rarity lifted onto her hind legs and got a foreleg around Blueblood's neck. The lady then launched herself forward, forcing Blueblood to turn around, and landed on her back, bringing Blueblood's frontal body down with her. The crowd shared some coos and laughs of astonishment.

With a growl, Blueblood shoved himself onto his feet. "I have had *quite* enough!!" The contender pony made a few slides forward to get in close, weaved through an attempted blocking jab, and threw back one of the gloves. "*Finish!!*" He threw the glove forward, propelling himself. His finishing blow generated a swirl of magical wing around the air he tore through.

Rarity saw the attack and instinctively worked her luchadora's mobility to backflip out of the torrential magic. The glove's strike punched into the air she had been standing in and past it, but the boost fell barely short of actually catching her. Rarity finished her backflip well away from harm. Blueblood could only utter a baffled, "What...?" while his gloves were held by the magic they whipped up.

The window of opportunity was brief, so Rarity literally hopped on it. Of course, not before giving a dramatic gesture at Blueblood. Rarity flipped forward back at Blueblood, over his glove, right on his shoulders. "La Rareza...!" She announced. He held a showy hoof in the air while Blueblood turned his head up in confusion. Rarity then clenches her hooves on Blueblood's head and flipped over. The motion flipped Blueblood straight around her and slammed him flat on his back. The attack was not done, however. Still with a grip on Blueblood's head, Rarity took a magical leap into the air "Flying...!" She took Blueblood up with her and leaned back to go back-to-back and grab his hind legs. In this hold, Rarity used the magic to begin spinning forward, taking Blueblood along for the ride to the ground. "GIGA BUSTER!!" The pair hit the ground hard, Blueblood's frontal body taking all the impact.

"K.O.!!!" The Hoof of War bellowed.

Rarity disembarked the wrecked noble as soon as she could and let him unfold onto the paved street. She dusted herself off and admired her hoofiwork while the gilded magic

faded into the wind. "Not quite how I envisioned getting closure on this, hm... *chapter* of my love life, but I'd be lying if I said it wasn't at least satisfying. Blueblood, darling, we MUST do this again." With a swipe of her mane and a delicate titter, Rarity sauntered off, followed by a portion of the crowd.

Blueblood lifted his head to see the rest of the disappointed mares filing out, back to their days. Hayley walked beside him and looked around. "Didn't quite pan out how you expected, did it?"

Rather than respond to that, Blueblood just groaned and let his head hit the ground again.

"Is that a 'no?' I'm going to take that as a 'no.'"

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There was more showmanship taking place outside Ponyville, albeit amateur. The Cutie Mark Crusaders, won over by the Great and Powerful Trixie's show of strength against the violent griffon, were trying their hooves at being theatrical and strong just like Trixie... but in their own ways. But not TOO far away from Trixie. Keeping the rowdy fillies calm during their training was proving impossible, so Trixie called a much-needed break for questions.

"So how great and how powerful do we need to be?" Scootaloo asked when called. "Is it an equal amount of greatness and powerfulness or is there some ratio we need to keep in mind?"

Trixie mulled it over. "Well... neither of those things. No pony likes a copycat and I have the market cornered on being Great and Powerful. I also have patents pending on Radiantly Stunning, Truly Amazing - I inherited that one - and Grape and Powderful... for my juice brand. In progress."

Scootaloo's incredulous silence gave Apple Bloom her turn to ask a question. "When is it ya get hit in the face and fall down again? Is that BEFORE or AFTER y'say real loud that it's time y'got serious?"

"Ooh!" Sweetie Belle raised a hoof and spoke ahead, "Can we get hit somewhere else other than the face? My sister Rarity once said that with her luck having a big flank runs in the family so maybe it would hurt less because of all the cushioning!"

Where does a pony start in responding to that? That was what Trixie was going to ask somebody when she would think back to this moment in the future. Fortunately for her, another voice spoke up to loosely respond.

"That's gonna be a whole lotta BLANK!"

The four turned to the source of the voice. Trixie genuinely unknowing and the Crusaders genuinely disdainful. They got eyefulls of two Cutie Marks before the owners turns fully around to face the trio.

"Great..." Scootaloo moaned, "Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon."

"THE two and only!" Diamond Tiara responded proudly, then her expression soured. "We heard that YOU blank flanks were joining this big tournament, and we both agreed that we won't have you representing Ponyville fillies when you don't even have Cutie Marks!"

Apple Bloom and Scootaloo got right up in the other two's faces. Apple Bloom stuck a hoof out, "Yeah, well we represent 'em a whole lot better'n you two... you two, um..."

Scootaloo finished, "... Meanies!"

"Meanies!" Apple Bloom echoed.

In the back, Trixie asked aside to Sweetie Belle, "Do fillies walk around in the open without supervision all the time in this town...?"

"Even the colt who was taking applications could recognize our majesty and let us right in!" Silver Spoon proclaimed proudly.

"What!?" Apple Bloom exclaimed, "How irresponsible IS that pony?"

Scootaloo shrugged, "Well... he WAS kind of a wimp."

Diamond Tiara continued, "And these Hooves of War look SO much better on us than on *your* ruddy hooves."

"Shows what you know!" Scootaloo snapped back, "We've never even PLAYED that sport!"

Rather than dignify that retort, Diamond Tiara just clicked her tongue. "Come on, it was a mistake coming out here. These blank-flanks aren't worth our time."

Apple Bloom ran right up to the pair, "Oh YEAH? Well I think YOU'RE the ones who aren't worth OUR time! Put 'em up!"

The Cutie Marked fillies watched Apple Bloom rear up onto her hind hooves and make a show of jabbing her forehooves out. The show ended when Apple Bloom wobbled off-balance and moved quickly to land back on all fours.

The pair looked at Apple Bloom's show and had to laugh, followed by Diamond Tiara speaking up. "If we're not worth your time, why are you challenging us? Your comebacks

are as blank as your flanks and brains!" She looked to her companion, "I think they won't get it unless we SHOW them."

That admission got the other three less rowdy and more focused. Diamond Tiara struck a hoof down, Silver Spoon one of her own, and the both of them stamped their opposite hooves to summon the Hoof of War.

Apple Bloom cast a spirited look to Scootaloo, a confident one to Sweetie Belle, and looked to Trixie, who seemed to still be lost about the situation. The earth filly bantered to her opponents, "Y'all better be ready to get rocked HARD 'cause we're deciphers o' th' Great 'n Powerful Trixie!"

While the other two looked aside to Trixie, Sweetie Belle whispered "Disciples!"

"Is that so...?" Diamond Tiara mused, looking Trixie over. Trixie gave a bemused look back. "Well, at least she has a Cutie Mark."

Trixie took that as a compliment for a few seconds before realizing that probably wasn't the case.

Silver Spoon spoke in turn, "We'll even let YOU have the first move..."

The Cutie Mark Crusaders turned inward for a quick huddle, inspiring the pair to exchange looks.

"All right, girls." Apple Bloom whispered, "Ain't nothin' t' be afraid of. There's three of US and two of 'EM!"

Sweetie Belle perked, "And if we use what Trixie taught us, there's no *way* we can lose!"

Scootaloo chimed in, "Now you're thinking! I've been wanting to take it to THOSE to for a long time now."

Diamond Tiara grunted impatiently, "Are you three going to fight or NOT?"

The Cutie Mark Crusaders shared a nod and turned back to the other three in unison. "Be careful what you wish for!" Sweetie Belle announced, taking her place on a side, posing with her forelegs lifted in a combat-ready formation.

"Cause you just might get it!" Scootaloo continued, posing the same but on Apple Bloom's other side and facing the other way.

"An' believe you me," Apple Bloom recited, posing up herself, "Yer gonna get it. Watch an' be amazed as your will to fight... disappears."

"CUTIE MARK CRUSADERS GREAT AND POWERFUL CUTIE MARK CLASHERS GO!!"

[DJ PON-3's playlist]

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The trio made a totem pole of themselves similar to before. This time, Sweetie Belle took bottom and took Scootaloo's hind legs in her magic. She twirled the other two around and let them go at a high velocity. In the air, Scootaloo turned herself around and bucked Apple Bloom down, adding more speed to the Earth filly's descent straight at Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon. She descended on them with a destructive hoof forward. Her opponents got a nice, good look at her coming down. In fact, the look was too nice and far too good. They had ample time to step away and allow the Apple family's youngest right between them. She hit the ground with a firm smack.

Upon a groggy rise, Apple Bloom found herself lifted up a little higher by Silver Spoon's hoof. The hold kept her own forehooves off the ground, so she couldn't nudge her way out of it.

"Sending *you* out to do any real work," Diamond Tiara muttered with a lecturing voice, "That's *some* teamwork you blank flanks have going. Let's show her some *real* teamwork!"

With that, Silver Spoon whipped around to quickly buck Apple Bloom's flank, sending her forward. The very moment she was launched, Diamond Tiara leapt to intercept, hold, and give her own buck. This led into Silver Spoon's interception and vicious inescapable cycle.

"We have to-!" Scootaloo yelped, then winced with every buck Apple Bloom took. "How come WE'RE feeling it!?" Wincing from Sweetie Belle confirmed that.

"Balance issues," a sudden Hayley said simply. "It hardly seems fair for three fully healthy fillies to all gang up on one opponent. That's why your Hooves of War are connected, sharing the same collective vitality. Teaching you, hm, the value of conservative play, I suppose. Same principle as why it gives you a bigger hitbox, too-Hello!" He turned away from the carnage to Trixie. "We meet again! Want to talk to you; now is preferable."

Trixie hummed with indecision. She weighed keeping tabs on the fight in front of her with the young stallion borderline demanding her attention. She spoke to the two fillies now getting ganged on, "The Great and Powerful Trixie will be RIGHT back after talking with Mr. Officiator here." She ducked away, obscuring Hayley's confused musings, insisting that 'Officiator' was no part of his name.

Sweetie Belle kept staring after. "But... it's *your*-"

"WAHHH!"

The startled cries of the Cutie Marked fillies snapped Sweetie Belle around to see Scootaloo rushing a freshly saved Apple Bloom back a safe distance from the other two. Sweetie Belle trotted up to meet her fellow crusaders halfway.

Apple Bloom gave a relieved exhale, "Thanks, Scootaloo. What'n tarnation kept ya?"

Sweetie Belle answered, more concerned than she thought she was, "Trixie isn't watching!"

Scootaloo frowned, "So?"

Apple Bloom was a little quicker on the uptake with Sweetie Belle's expectations. "Why... don't you worry none! When Trixie gets back here and sees we've done cleaned up she'll be proud of us!"

Sweetie Belle offered up a smile which Apple Bloom sent back. Their moment was interrupted by Diamond Tiara.

"That whirling move was... cheap! And you didn't even follow up on it? Are you three going to fight or what? I... I wouldn't be surprised if it was 'what!' You're all probably just a bunch of 'what-ers' 'what-ing' around doing 'what' things!!"

The Cutie Mark Crusaders were weary with the tirade and it was Scootaloo that jumped ahead with a shout of "Say 'what' again!!" She growled at the perplexed looks she got back. "Say 'what' again! I dare you! I DOUBLE dare you, bu-" and then she found Apple Bloom's hoof stuffing her mouth.

"OKAY!" the earth filly called over her friend, "I think they got the point, Scoot." She pulled out her now drooled-on hoof. "Of all the things I learned from Applejack..."

Diamond Tiara and Silver Spoon descended on the three. Their assault was meant with empty space soon filled by the Cutie Mark Crusaders coming right back with a coordinated impact that hit both opponents. Just like them, their vitality was shared; and took a big hit from that attack.

Apple Bloom beamed, "That's what we call the Bait 'n Tackle!"

"Bait and Switch." Sweetie Belle corrected.

"Yeah, uh... that."

Diamond Tiara accepted her partner's help in picking herself up, shortly glaring. "If 'that'

is the best you've got, pack it up now!"

The Crusaders were upon the pair shortly, words having overstayed their welcome. They moved in a loose line, organized but flexible. They went in for another tackle but the other two were prepared. They threw up their forehooves and together pushed back against the assault. The effort halted the Crusaders in their place. They quickly made to circle to the pair's back, but they read that move well and early. They held in position and once the Crusaders made their shift, swept their hooves. The sweep covered all the ground around them, especially where the Crusaders stood. Apple Bloom and Scootaloo were swept off their hooves and in position for Silver Spoon to hop and buck them back into the ground. Sweetie Belle acted fast to magically tug her friends back and away from the buck.

Still with a grip of magic on the other two Crusaders, Sweetie Belle saw the readiness in the other two. Using the momentum of the pull, Sweetie Belle sent Apple Bloom and Scootaloo forward again, launching them like cannon balls. Diamond Tiara could only gawk as Apple Bloom slammed into her and Silver Spoon has just turned around when Scootaloo bowled her over.

The launched fillies bounced off their targets and returned to their places to pose, now with Sweetie Belle in the middle. Apple Bloom bantered, "Great 'n Powerful enough for ya?"

Diamond Tiara stuttered, "F-fluke shots! Let's see you try that again!"

The Cutie Mark Crusaders exchanged nods, then indeed went straight back to having Sweetie Belle lift up the other two, ready for launch. Sweetie Belle readied Apple Bloom at the pair, watching for any indication of quick movement. A burst of magic, and Apple Bloom was en route for a crash. However, the targets didn't fret it at all. In fact, they looked all too ready. They both reared back dominant forehooves in preparation for Apple Bloom's arrival. In a panic, Sweetie Belle sent Scootaloo down as well. She could then only watch as the pair met Apple Bloom by swinging their forehooves down with the force of hammers. Apple Bloom was sent right back into Scootaloo. The two crashed mid-air with a force so powerful that Sweetie Belle could literally feel.

While the fight boiled into whiffs and hoofcuffs, Trixie returned from her little talk.

Hayley finished his thought, "Just- I'd just like you to keep it in mind. I'm sure there's a lot of mind up there! Just find some small part of it to keep that in. It would *really* help me out. Even better? If you actually *did* something."

Sweetie Belle took a look, saw Trixie, and gasped in delight. "She's back!"

The other Crusaders took notice. "Really?" Scootaloo piqued. "Now we can show off the good stuff!" The trio took to their posing theatrics again.

"Y'all did good to keep up with us!" Apple Bloom admitted in the showy tone.

Scotaloo drew her forehoof across her neck, "But now... it ENDS."

Sweetie Belle continued ominously, "Get ready for..."

"THE CUTIE MARK CRUSADER GREAT AND POWERFUL STACK OF PAIN!!!"

The trio leapt forward and landed just in front of the opposing pair. Apple Bloom on the bottom, holding up Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo on top. They each stuck out a hind leg and with a beat of Scootaloo's wings, spun in place at their opponents. Silver Spoon had been up front and completely unprepared, so she took the brunt of the attack. Diamond Tiara had a moment to notice her partner getting thrashed and tossed up a defensive forehoof. The force of the kicks took its toll on Silver Spoon, which Diamond Tiara could feel. Her standing hooves began to weaken and buckle under the pressure of the fatigue creeping up on her due to the vitality that Silver Spoon was burning through. In any other situation, she would have been happy to just lay down and let somepony tend to her...

And then the Crusaders' attack ran out of steam. The tall structure of their cooperation unfurled as they took their places on solid ground. Diamond Tiara's face curved in a sharp, sadistic grin.

"GET THEM!!!"

Those words snapped Silver Spoon into action. With a wide grip she managed to capture all three of the Cutie Mark Crusaders in her hold. She didn't do anything with them, and all attention was clearly on Diamond Tiara. She held a bucking position, her body shaking with rapidly growing reserves of stored energy. "LET 'EM GO!" Taking the cue, Silver Spoon then took liberty with the act of 'letting them go' and instead opted to give them a courtesy toss into the ground. The Hoof of War's magic allowed them to bounce off the ground, but all to their disadvantage. Diamond Tiara unleashed her stored-up buck. Two hooves and three fillies didn't add up, but the force of the buck created one large impact area that caught all three of them.

"K.O.!!!" The Hoof of War bellowed.

The force of the hit launched the fillies airborne to a painful landing on the ground. Once they were safely landed, the Hoof of War took its leave with a breeze. The Cutie Mark Crusaders remained where they lay, heaving partially with fatigue, but also pending sobs.

Diamond Tiara opened her mouth to say something, but Silver Spoon quickly got the first words in. "I don't think anything we say can make it even worse for them than it already is. I think what just happened speaks for itself."

The pink filly of the two considered what her gray-coated partner proposed. Her expression turned from incredulous to devious. "That is a *wonderful* idea, Silver Spoon. This deserves a victory lunch. I think these three already know what's what."

With that, the pair with the marked flanks sauntered off, victorious, but not before passing by Trixie and passing a smug smile off to her. The robed mare was by herself on the sidelines, Hayley having said his piece and departed already. When the pair was well off in the distance, Trixie approach her immobile unmoving apprentices. "Ah... not all performances end as we'd like, the Great and Powerful Trixie is sorry to say."

Her words were only met with the sniffing of the trio before her. They managed to pick themselves off the ground, but that was about it. They could only stare at the ground as their sniffles increased in intensity and frequency.

Trixie tried her best showmare's grin. "C, come on, now. The only tears a performer needs to be concerned with is those of her audience when weaving an emotional tale!"

The Crusaders looked up at Trixie, which immediately took down her mood as well. She could see in their eyes the humiliation, the indignity, the frustration and disillusionment. She could also see tears in abundance. "Please... don't..."

"We're sorry, Trixie!" Sweetie Belle burst. "We couldn't be as Great and Powerful as you even though you tried so hard to teach us!"

Trixie's expression changed from nervously sympathetic to perplexed. "You... apologize to me? Ah, the Great and Powerful Trixie? This is why you feel so bad?"

"Uh-huh..." Sweetie Belle moaned. Behind her, it was clear that the other two were far from sharing the same sentiment. Nopony was in the mood to correct her.

The Great and Powerful Trixie had been in the presence of crying foals before, but never before did she feel so directly responsible for the crying. "You... you did not disappoint the Great and Powerful Trixie. Bad days happen! It's a fact of life, and um, stuff. Do you think the Great and Powerful Trixie folds up and cries whenever she has a bad day?"

"N, no..."

"Exactly! She gets right back on her hooves and thinks, 'Next show!' Every show is a brand new canvas for the Great and Powerful Trixie to paint her greatness!"

"Next show..." Sweetie Belle murmured back.

Trixie tried to offer a smile down. "Next show. Do you feel better now? I mean... as long as you don't start crying I'm fine with-"

The fillies converged on her with comfort-seeking hugs. After a stunned moment, Trixie tried her awkward best to fit all three in one.

"Ah, yes. This is... conductive. I can only imagine."

Scotaloo proclaimed, albeit a bit muffled, "I promise I'll take you more seriously from now on!"

"Same here!" came the muffled earth filly on the side side.

"Yes..." Trixie muttered, tending to the needs of her distraught pupils. These fillies were getting closer to her, whether she liked it or not. And yet... whatever it meant or however it went, she was up to the challenge. This much was made clear by her face hardening with determination.

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Outside of Ponyville, but in another direction, a mint-colored unicorn carried her injured earth pony friend in a rush to town. The path connecting the town to Everfree was normally safe and seldom traveled... and she knew a shortcut through the thicket to get there faster! She trotted up to the brush and made to leap over it. That was until a wall of golden magic stopped her in place and forced her jump short. She whirled around in a frustrated panic to see who in all of Equestria would challenge her to a CLASH even after seeing the condition they were in.

Lyra's brow furrowed. "Aren't you... Fluttershy? Why in the hay do you want to fight now!?"

Fluttershy's eyes widened slightly. "Oh... no! Not a fight! You were about to step on that rabbit hole and the only way I knew how to stop you was by doing that."

"Okay... but what are we going to do about this fight we're in now? You took *both* of us with you!"

Fluttershy shrunk back a little. "Oh... were we fighting? I'm sorry. If we were, I give up!"

The Hoof of War complied, vanishing in the wind.

Lyra blinked, "You... just gave yourself two losses!"

"Did I do that?" Fluttershy gasped, "I'm sorry..."

"Don't apologize to *me*!"

"Oh! Um... I'm... sorry..."

The awkwardness of Fluttershy catching herself apologizing when told not to cast a silence over the two standing ponies. It wasn't long before Fluttershy actually found something to bring up. "Um... is she okay?"

Lyra spared a look over her shoulder. "She could be better. She really got it in another fight trying to protect me. And, well... seeing what she went through I couldn't just lay around. Speaking of which, I don't feel very good either."

"Oh, my! Well, my house is close to here. I was coming this way to avoid everything going on in town... I'll have you feeling better the old-fashioned way in no time!"

"I thought you only took care of animals."

"Ponies are animals, too."

Lyra stared ahead blankly in response to the flat response. "Yeah. Ponies. We're ponies."

Ignoring the unicorn's questionable grasp on her own species, Fluttershy smiled. "Come along, now. This way!"

Fluttershy lead Lyra up the path to her place. And no actual fighting happened.

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[Matchup sheet!](#)

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Calling all musically inclined bronies!

Why yes, it's been a while. A new internship will do that to one's free time. Now that I've found my writing groove again and have the future chapters planned out, I want to be more ambitious with the Cutie Mark Clash. My original intention with DJ PON-3's playlist was to highlight obscure, forgotten, or just retro gaming music. But now I have a better idea: Giving the spotlight to brony composers.

This is where you come in. If you find Friendship is Magic-themed brony-created music anywhere on the Internet that sounds like it would make good fight music (the definition of "fight music" may vary and I accept wide variations), send it over to me more consideration! This includes original music and remixes.

Even better, if YOU create music and want to collaborate with pieces for DJ PON-3's playlist, I am well accepting applications. This requires you knowing what happens in the story ahead of time, which doubles as a perk!

Hit me up at Venuser@AOL.com if you're interested. Or if, you know, you just want to say "Hi." That works too.